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WANDERING BLINDFOLD

A BOY'S TROUBLES



17. 1841.



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"NOT ROBERT WATSON, SURELY."

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WANDERING BLINDFOLD:

A BOY'S TROUBLES.

BY

MARY ALBERT,

AUTHOR OF "BUTTERFLIES AND FAIRIES," "FREDDIE'S LATIN LESSONS," "HOLLAND
AND HER HEROES," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY ALFRED JOHNSON.



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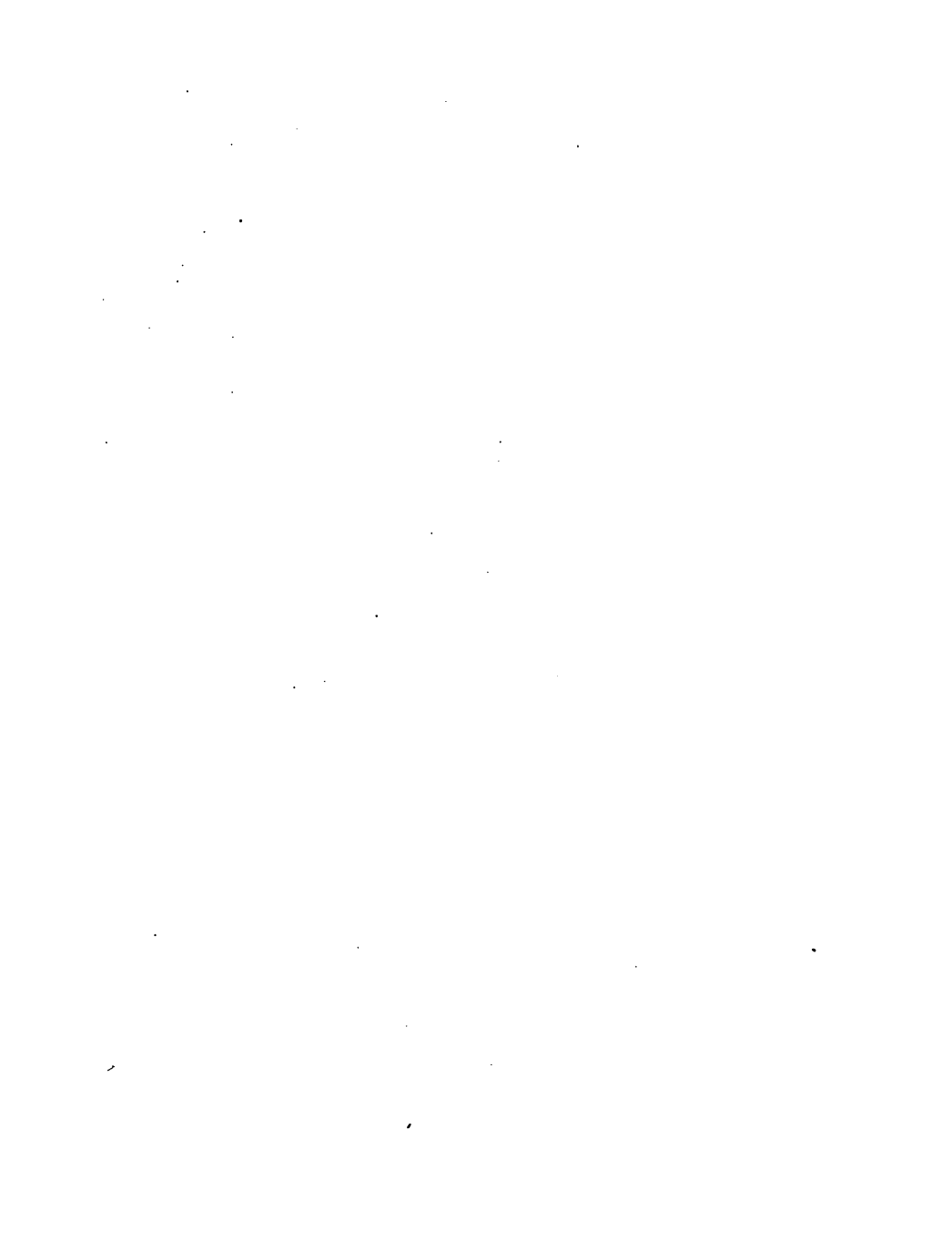




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WANDERING BLINDFOLD.

CHAPTER I.

ROBERT.



HAPPY boy was Robert Watson. Yet he knew that he would have to work hard as soon as he left school, for his father was but a labouring man, and, with the wages he earned, had enough to do to bring up his five children decently.

Perhaps one reason why his home was happy was because work was there done well and heartily by all the members of the family. Even Robert's little sister, Emmy, helped her good mother in her small way when she came back from school. As for Robert, he made himself

useful indoors and out, and on summer evenings, who had pleasanter work than he? There were the rabbits to feed,—green-meat to get for them from the hedge-rows; he had to help his father water the garden, or to rake the flower-beds—and a pleasant place the garden was even in winter.

Robert used to do bits of carpenter's work too; he had now and then mended a chair, or made a box for his mother, for he was clever with his fingers, and liked to be of use. To be helpful to others was thought an honourable thing by his father and mother; as indeed it is, and our heavenly Father teaches us, in many ways, that work is dignified, while sloth is to be despised.

Thus Robert worked hard at school and at home, and was, as we have said, a very happy boy; indeed, he would never have been unhappy if he had not been careless, often forgetting to do necessary things which his father bade him do; things for which he had plenty of time, but which he would put off doing if he wished to finish something else at the moment. Or perhaps it was time to start for school, and even if on his return he chanced to remember his father's command, he would still put off executing it, and go on doing

things he liked best, first. This had often occurred lately, and his father had felt vexed, when coming home tired, to have to do himself some work which his son could easily have spared him. Then he would speak sternly to his boy, and the supper, usually a comfortable and social meal, would be taken in silence.

Robert knew that this made his mother and his little sisters and brother unhappy, when, but for his habit of carelessness, they might all have enjoyed being together, and at such times he would resolve to do better, and *not* to forget. But, alas! bad habits, when we allow them to creep upon us, by not at once resisting them bravely, are not thrown off by a mere resolve.

But to begin my story.

In one corner of Watson's garden stood a rabbit hutch, where lived the rabbits before alluded to; and at the opposite corner was the pig-stye. This stye was kept clean and neat, and Robert liked to keep it so, and to make the animal he had to feed and take care of as comfortable as he could; and the creature thrived accordingly.

On the day when my story opens, Watson had enjoined his son to nail a piece of wood across

two loose palings of the sty, adding, that this must be attended to at once, before Robert went to school, otherwise the pig might escape and spoil the flower-beds.

Robert promised, and *meant* to perform ; but as soon as his father had left home for work the boy thought he should just have time to finish a toy-boat which he was making for a school-fellow. "There will be plenty of time for that, and to nail up the gap, too, Emmy," said he, to his youngest little sister.

"But I'm just going to get ready for school," replied the little girl.

"All right, I'll run all the way!" said Robert, working away at his boat, but thinking of the broken paling all the while. Every moment he *intended* to leave off and do what his father had told him to do, but his interest in the boat was so keen that on he worked at the toy till the clock in the kitchen began to strike nine! Then he was frightened,—threw down his boat, and ran all the way to school ; but was, of course, late, and felt unprepared for lessons. His mind was worried about his broken promise, and earnestly he hoped *that the pig would not get out while he was away.*

"Then all will be right," thought he, "for I'll nail up the board the moment I get home!"

His father would not return till evening, so that Robert hoped, after all, to avoid his displeasure, and now felt really sorry that he had not put duty before pleasure.

It was a relief to him when twelve o'clock struck, and he could run home, but when he got to the garden gate he saw his mother sitting down there, on an overturned basket, looking flushed and worried.

"Oh! Robert! Robert!" she exclaimed, as he ran up, "if I had only known you'd not done what your father told you I'd have done it myself! I heard you promise him, and so I got to my washing at once; but better for me if I'd just sat down and been idle, for the pig has got out, and trampled over all the things I'd spread out on the patch of grass to dry this fine day, and he's torn some to bits. What ever the squire's young ladies will say, *I* don't know. It will cost two or three pounds to make good all those lace handkerchiefs. I shall lose all the money I looked for! Oh! Robert! it *was* cruel of you! I don't know what your father will say!"

Robert knew—and he was in despair. The pig had not only destroyed the fine linen and lace belonging to the young ladies at the Hall, for whom Robert's mother acted as laundress (thereby earning enough to pay the family rent, and more besides), but the garden was trampled and untidy, the garden on which his father looked with just pride.

Poor, troubled Mrs. Watson had managed to fasten up the palings in a rough manner with an old broom-handle, and was resting, panting, and sorely worried after her exertions. Robert, who was quick to feel and to foresee all the annoyance and trouble he had caused, burst into tears, at which sight his kind mother relented, and in a short time the boy, somewhat eased in heart by her kindness and his flow of tears, had mended the hole nicely. It took but a quarter of an hour to do, and when the work was finished Robert could not help reflecting how much pain and discomfort he might have saved himself, his mother, and his father, if he had but done this necessary thing at the proper time.

He worked hard to remove the traces of disorder left by the pig, both before afternoon school

and immediately on his return, but it was impossible to replace the trampled flowers, or the torn lace, and very miserable he felt, instead of being glad when he heard his father's step and voice in the evening.

"Why, how's this? Didn't Robert nail up that plank as he promised?" inquired Watson.

His mother was obliged to confess what had happened; but she added many kind words about her boy's great sorrow at his forgetfulness, and declared she believed "this *would* be the last time he would forget,—it would be such a lesson to him."

"It *must* be the last time, or I must make him remember some other way," replied her husband very sternly.

Watson was a good man, but strict with his children, as he thought it his duty to be.

"Robert!" he called out in his sternest voice.

Robert dared not disobey the call, and so came at once. "The next time you forget, after promising faithfully to do a simple thing, I shall thrash you, because it will be my duty to do so. Do you hear?"

The boy could barely reply, "Yes, father."

"I shall keep my word, remember. And now go to bed without your supper!"

Robert went, and there cried himself to sleep, saying to himself over and over again that next time he would attend to duty before play or pleasure.

This last act of carelessness of his—for carelessness it was rather than forgetfulness—cost him so many hours of regret, that for weeks to come, when his father or mother asked him to 'do any little service, he went immediately to do it.

"I shall thrash you, because it will be my duty to do so," still at times sounded in his ears.

Four years since, when Robert was a child seven years old, his father had beaten him, but that was for telling an untruth, and persisting in it. He had since grown to understand that it is as honourable to be truthful as to be industrious; that it is as disgraceful to tell a lie as to be slothful, and more injurious to the character. Both at school, at church, and at home, he heard continually that he must begin now whilst he was young to think last of self, not first; always to try to be kind and useful, to cultivate good temper in order to add to others' happiness, to strive to be

noble even in the small matters of every-day life, so that he might make himself worthy to be trusted, and might grow up to be an honourable man.

We must say just another word here of Robert's little sister Emmy, a blue-eyed maiden not yet five years old. She was a sweet, unselfish child, and loved "Bobby" as much as he loved her. Young as she was, her readiness to give up what she liked to do, if, in that way, she could help anybody at home, and her affection for them all there, were a great help to Robert, though he never thought about it. And yet he had often reflected that "if a little girl like Emmy can remember to do as she is told, I ought;" while the thought of the tears which so quickly clouded her bright blue eyes when "Father" spoke to "Bobby" with displeasure, always cut Robert to the heart. He could not bear to pain this little sister of his, who never pained him. How well he remembered the sob he heard as she crept up to bed on the evening of that day when he had so carelessly neglected to mend the gap in the pig-stye. "I *never* will make Emmy sob and cry again!" was the boy's resolve—"Never!" That was long ago now. It was Midsummer when Robert had so

greatly displeased his father, and harassed his mother by his neglect about mending the stye. Autumn came with golden harvests and wealth of fruit before he again transgressed in like manner. In common with all the village children he had holidays during the harvest, and enjoyed, as much as any boy in the whole parish, freedom from school-work, and the long hours spent in gleaning in the yellow corn-fields during the pleasant August days.





CHAPTER II.

ALONE !



THOSE who have lived in, or travelled about the beautiful county of Surrey, will remember an elevated part of it called Hind Head.

Miles of purple heather stretch across the land, groups of larch and pine are seen in the distance, the valley around looks lovely indeed in the gay light of the sun ; undulations in the landscape make a delightful view for the tourist ; the air is so fresh and invigorating, the colours everywhere so vivid, that a traveller climbing Hind Head for the first time must pause in astonishment to find so grand a view within so short a distance of London.

But when evening draws on, the utter loneliness

of the place makes itself felt ; no house is near, there is only the stone pillar, raised to mark the highest point of the elevation ; the grandeur of the spot is not lessened in the fading light, but it is the grandeur of solitude, the trees in the distance become lost in gloom,—the loneliness is complete.

On one part of Hind Head a sort of gravestone shows where a sailor was murdered many years since ; and when passing it, the benighted traveller involuntarily quickens his pace towards home.

At the close of a brilliant August day a young and unhappy wanderer neared this desolate spot, in a country which, in sunlight, is so rich and bright. This wanderer was no other than Robert ; who had fled from his home that day. Why the unhappy boy had done so we shall see presently.

He was very tired now ; the sun had not long since sunk magnificently from sight behind the gorgeous, purple-coloured hill which the boy had mounted so wearily that afternoon, and where he now threw himself down among the heather, *utterly desolate.*

As he gazed into the sky a wonderful sight met his eyes ; a long line of clouds, standing up like mountains, tinged with the deepest colours of the sunset, glowed with flame-colour and gold on one side, whilst their opposite side was of blue.

The sight was so grand, the loneliness so complete, the line of mountain clouds so magnificent, that Robert seemed to himself, in his lonely sorrow, to be standing face to face with heaven. He was alone with the sky and the grandeur of nature,—alone with *God*, and he bowed his head in fear. Yes, in fear ; for he felt he could not ask God to bless his doings of the past day. A coward terror urging him to seek to avoid the consequences of his fault had made him fly from home. What would now become of him ? He felt he never dared go back ! Now, *now*, when he said to himself that it was too late, he bemoaned his rashness, his folly, his wrongdoing.

Better two or three beatings from his father than leave his home for ever,—than never to see little Emmy and the others, or his dear mother again ! At the thought he hid his face in his hands and shed bitter tears. But soon another

feeling, an emotion of fear crept over him ; he was so small, so entirely alone in that great, vast solitude ! All at once he thought of Jacob on the plain of Bethel, how he had taken of the stones of that place, and made of them a pillow, and slept ; and of the glorious vision sent to him, of angels ascending and descending on the ladder set up, whose top reached to heaven. He now recalled the Bible story with vivid interest ; he wondered if Jacob had found himself in a country at all like this ; somehow he thought it must in a measure resemble it ; the sky was so intensely clear, so wonderfully beautiful, and heaven appeared so near to him. Jacob, too, was a wanderer, fleeing from home, for fear of his brother Esau's wrath ; he, Robert, was also a wanderer, flying from his father's anger. But then, said a voice in his heart, Jacob went at the command of his parents, whilst *you* have fled without a word to them ; and you know it would be right to go back. " But I dare not ! " replied he to himself, " and now I do not even know the way ! "

Yes, it was too true ! He had wandered so far on foot, besides travelling some miles by railway, that he was utterly confused and bewildered, and

imagined that he was very much further from home than was actually the case.

The large white moon rose slowly and grandly over the lonely place. Robert shivered with excitement, with fatigue, with grief, and fear, and the fresh wind which swept over the high plain incited him to rise and go on again—anywhere—somewhere—he knew nothing now of the direction in which he was going. Nothing was clear to his grief-stricken young heart but that he must lie down somewhere to sleep or he should die, and that he must try to find some rough shelter before exhaustion quite mastered him.

Thus on he went again under the light of the moon, and at last he got into the road, which lay white and distinct in the moonlight. On, on he went, stumbling, afraid, weary, sorrowful, and towards midnight drew near to a habitation; a farm nestling among trees; where the smell of new-made stacks was sweet. It seemed quite warm here in the valley, and there was hardly any dew; he would creep into the deep shadow of the wheat-stack nearest to him, rest his back against the corn, and sleep. He stumbled over the gate which separated him from this shelter, and with a sob in

his heart at remembering that he had to rest thus for the first time under the sky like a vagrant, he fell into deepest slumber.

The sun was high above the horizon when



the boy awoke.

Cheerful noises reached his ear, voices of men going about their morning work, the closing of a gate, the tramp of a horse. He roused himself and gazed about him, still half enchained by drowsiness. A good - natured - looking farmer, with a smile on his ruddy face,

was standing by him, apparently amused at discovering the sleeping boy.

"Time to get up, eh?" said a cheery voice.

"So you've been under the stack here all night, instead of in your own bed!"

Robert stammered, "Ye-es, sir!" and stood up.

"If you're far from home, you'd best have some breakfast in the kitchen before starting. Where do you live?" continued the kind-hearted farmer.

"I'm looking for work, sir! I'm many a mile from home. I'd travelled a good bit yesterday, and so slept under the stack."

"Looking for work!" echoed Robert's questioner. "Well, we could do with another hand or two till all the harvest's got in! But you don't seem like a boy accustomed to sleep out of doors. Did you ever pass a night out of your bed before?"

Robert said, "No, sir!" adding that "last night he had been so tired he was glad to lie down anywhere!"

"And now you'll be glad of breakfast, I should think!" said the farmer, looking at the boy's tidy clothes and neat appearance, for, though he had rested in the field all night, he had the air of a respectable, well-brought-up boy. "But first I want to know where you come from?" added the farmer.

"Down Petersfield way," answered Robert

vaguely. "I hope you'll give me some work, sir, for I've no home now ; I'm looking for work !"

"Can you lead horses ?" asked the farmer.

"Yes, and likes it !" replied Robert.

"Well, go and wash your face at the pump, and then you shall have some breakfast, and we'll settle about wages and tell you where you can get a bed when work's over. Look alive ! We must get a good deal of corn in to-day."

This sudden and unexpected provision of food and work, the necessity of grasping it now it was to be had, the loss of all time to dwell at this moment on his loneliness, his grief, and his strange situation, all made the boy able to go on without betraying his breaking heart, which continually turned towards his mother and Emmy, and his little brother and sisters.

All through that warm autumn day, at every pause in his work, as he led the horses in the waggon, and plodded on as he was told, he saw pictures of his lost home rise before him—pictures in which everything he had left was vividly recalled. The very rabbits in their hutch in the corner of the garden—*his* no more—were dearer to him now ; he wondered who would feed them, who would

find fresh sow-thistle and cow-parsley for them under the hedges. He even longed to see his father again, much as he now feared him; for after all he loved his father more dearly than he had supposed. But it seemed to his childish heart that he had offended him beyond forgiveness.

The fresh air, the necessity of 'looking alive!' as the farmer had phrased it, supported him through the day, and when evening came he was so weary that he could hardly manage to get to the village near, where, through the kind directions of the farmer's wife, he was to find a bed. A widow woman who worked at the farm was glad enough to get a lodger, and willingly made up a bed for the forlorn child in one of the two rooms of her cottage.

"You'll do very well," said the farmer kindly, when the day's work was over, "and you're a bit tired from yesterday. I'll try to hear of work for you hereabouts when harvesting's over. They might want a garden boy up at the great house."

Robert was somewhat comforted, though the pain at his heart never ceased. But he slept deeply, worn out with unusual toil and grief.

The woman Robert lodged with was obliged to be early at the farm, and as they trudged back together at the end of his second day's work, she began to question him—"Hadn't he got a mother alive, or a father?"

For all answer Robert burst into tears, and repeated through his sobs, what he had before told the farmer, that "he hadn't no home now—that he came from down Petersfield way—and that he had come from his own place to look for work."

The woman was sorry to have made him cry; she had heard talk of Petersfield, but had never been there, and took Robert's words to mean that he had now neither father nor mother, and so had lost his home. Not wishing to make him shed more tears, she began to talk about the people at the farm, saying how kind they were, and how she had worked for them now twenty years on and off.

It had been arranged that Robert should share her meals; and he soon found that, little as she asked for bed and board, and simple as was the fare, when he had paid her, he had but sixpence a week left from his earnings.



CHAPTER III.

A BROKEN PROMISE.

BUT we must now go back to explain what had happened to drive Robert from home.

Mr. Breeley, the clergyman at Lington (the village where the Watsons lived), was much beloved by his parishioners, and they were all sincerely sorry when they heard that he would be obliged to leave home for some weeks, perhaps months, on account of failing health.

His wife and family were to accompany him, and a strange gentleman from a distance was to take the duty at Lington during Mr. Breeley's absence. In consequence of this, the inmates of the Parsonage were busy packing up, and making arrangements, both for the reception of the new-

comer and for their own departure. Thus it happened that Robert's mother had for several days past been wanted to help at the Parsonage, for she was accustomed to work there whenever extra help was needed.

On this pressing occasion she had promised to go *every* day as long as she was required; and she had been obliged to ask a neighbour to come in and clean up her house for Sunday, and to do a bit of cooking now and then for the children and her husband during her constant absence, for she only got back late at night, and started again early in the morning.

"But I couldn't find it in my heart to refuse going even for a day," said poor Mrs. Watson afterwards, "they all being in such trouble about Mr. Breeley's being ill, and having so much to think about besides."

Whilst his mother was so much away, Robert was very handy at home. He used to get up, light the fire, and set the place in order for his father's breakfast, and do many things to help his young sisters at home, before he and they went off to glean in the harvest fields. The neighbour who came in now and then to cook had little else

to see to, and found all neat and orderly, though the work was left mostly to the children.

In the evening, after he had helped get his father's supper, fed his rabbits, and the pig, and done any other little thing which came to hand, he was almost too tired to wake up when his mother came home ; yet he was not happy without giving her a kiss at the end of the long day, though the time had been filled up usefully and happily.

"'T'won't be for much longer, my boy!" said Mrs. Watson on the Tuesday evening of her second week's work at the Parsonage. "Mrs. Breeley says they must manage to get off by Saturday!"

Alas! much—concerning Robert at least—was to happen before Saturday.

As the Sunday's provisions were all gone, that Tuesday morning their kind neighbour had promised to come in and cook something for Watson's supper ; and also prepare some dinner for the children, who were gleaning in a field near, and who were to run home in the middle of the day. Watson himself was to be absent as usual till evening ; he had been up before five o'clock that morning, doing an odd job or two ~~out of~~

doors before he left home, and mending the broken lock to a battered tin box in which he carefully kept the few papers of consequence belonging to him. Amongst these papers were the receipts for rent paid during all the years he had occupied his cottage, and the copy of his own marriage certificate. All these were tied up in two small bundles and placed in the tin case, the fastening of which had long required mending, and Watson had busied himself in doing this in the quiet hour before he left home. Robert found his father thus employed when he came downstairs and chatted to him as he lighted the fire and boiled the kettle for breakfast.

"Get all ready, my boy, and then I must be quick with my eating," said Watson to his son.

"The lock won't mend, father?" asked Robert.

"'Tis troublesome, my boy; but I'll finish him now before time's up. These papers, you see, I don't like to leave, except under lock and key, as it were!"

Robert soon got all prepared for his father, and the latter worked to the last moment before he completed the fastening.

"Robert!" he called, as he put down the box.

The boy ran at the call. He knew his father had something serious to say whenever he called him "Robert." Usually it was "Bob," or "Bobby."

"The box is finished ; but I've left the papers upstairs. Fetch them, and lock them up directly. I'm so late I must trust you to do this. I *can* trust you—hey?"

"Of course, father," answered Robert, confidently. "I'm nigh on eleven years old now."

"You know I should give you a thrashing for breaking your word about such a thing?"

"*I* know!" replied Robert, taking up the box, and trying the lock. It acted easily now, and Watson went off to his morning's work with a heart quite at ease about his papers. His son had promised to lock them up at once, he knew the consequences of carelessness and disobedience, and the duty required was so easy, and would take up but a moment or two ; so that the father could not imagine that his son would neglect to keep the promise he had just made.

And Robert watched his father disappear from the garden gate, and then took up the box, intending to take it upstairs with him, and safely enclose the papers therein.

Just then his younger brother and sisters scampered gaily downstairs. "How nice," cried Emmy, "to find breakfast ready!"

"Let's have it now, Bobby!" exclaimed all together.

Bobby said "Yes." He knew that not one of the younger ones would dare to touch anything their father left upstairs in his bedroom, so his mind was easy about the papers. "Of course, I'll lock 'em up the first minute we've done our breakfast," thought he.

But he had *promised* to do so *at once*, and oh! how much misery he would have spared himself and all his family—his loving mother and father especially—if he had kept to the letter of his word. For his father *was* a good and fond father to all his children, though he was strict, and though he believed—as the class he belongs to often believe—that a boy must be beaten to make him remember his duty. But what he did he did from a sense of duty. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it," he would say when his wife recommended gentler measures. "Let not thy soul spare for his crying," he would add.

"But we should try love first," Mrs. Watson ever replied.

All had gone very happily at the cottage till this morning during harvest. Robert had been careful to remember all his duties, and had been much the happier in consequence. It was, indeed, a sad thing that he so hastily decided within himself that, because he *knew* the papers were safe upstairs, he could put them into the box just as well after as *before* breakfast.

The children sat in the morning sunlight with the cottage door wide open. They talked fast enough, and were happy enough together, their thoughts full of all they had to do that day. The moment their meal was over the rabbits had to be fed, and the pig attended to, the tea-things to be put away, the kitchen swept up, and the kettle to be filled. Robert assisted in these operations, for they were all eager to set off to glean. "I'll run up directly a'most and put the papers away," thought he. Ah! if he had! Even now it would not have been too late.

Now, we know that Robert had been trying to do well; that he loved his mother and father, his brother and sisters, and hoped to go on doing

better ; but see how a small fault neglected brings large consequences with it.

"Don't you hear a noise, Bobby?" asked Dick, standing still in the doorway to listen, on which the other children stood listening intently also ; all but Robert, who was at that moment putting some sticks and coal ready at hand to light up the fire when it should next be wanted. His mind was, at the same time, occupied with the thought of the papers, the happy hours they would have together to-day, and his effort to finish quickly what he was about, for they were all eager to set off.

"I'm *sure* I heard something coming by!" exclaimed Emmy, in some excitement. (A passing carriage, or even a waggon, was always watched with interest by the village children.)

"Come on! make haste, Bobby!" called out Dick.

He and the other children were just ready to start, and Robert had the box in his hand, intending to rush upstairs with it, when Emmy suddenly called out, "Oh! Bobby! Bobby, come here! quick! to the garden gate!"

Helter-skelter the children followed each other,

and great was their excitement at beholding the long procession which was passing down the lane. Travelling carts of every size and shape, some drawn by horses, some by donkeys; gipsy men and women in their dirty, picturesque garments; gipsy children, in ragged clothes, running alongside barefoot, or carried at their mothers' backs.



Emmy, with her rosy mouth as wide open as her blue eyes, watched them all go by, and Robert was as much excited as his little sister. They wondered where all the carts and

the gipsies were going, whereabouts in the carts the little gipsy children slept, and a thousand other things. They were still talking together when their mother's friend and neighbour, Mrs. Ware, came in to do the cooking she had undertaken.

"Oh! we didn't expect you so early," cried Robert, "or we wouldn't have put the fire out."

"I'll soon light it," said Mrs. Ware cheerfully. "But I was forced to come now, or not at all, for I've some work come along unexpected."

Mrs. Ware went straight into the cottage, and as soon as she had thrown aside her bonnet began to light up the fire. There was no paper at hand, so she called to the children for some, but they did not hear, and, full of the necessity for hasty action, she mounted the stairs to fetch some old newspaper she remembered to have noticed the day before. The newspaper was no longer there, but there were some old folded bits of paper on the chair by Master Watson's bed.

"This bit or two will do," thought she; and in three minutes more all the carefully preserved receipts for rent were shrivelling in the newly relighted fire!



CHAPTER IV.

WHAT ROBERT DID !

DREAMING nothing of what had happened, Robert still stood by the garden gate gazing after the unusual sight, though the very last of it had vanished. But he had not forgotten what he had to do ; he had only *put off* doing it.

“ All of you go on—I’ll overtake you in a few minutes,” he said to his sisters and brother.

“ Oh ! start with us, Bobby, do ! ” entreated Emmy.

“ I can’t, Em. Father told me to be sure and do something for him before I went off this morning. But I’ll run after you quick ! ”

Emmy and the others knew that what their father enjoined must be attended to, so they started off without Robert, though Emmy often looked behind to see if he was coming.

Poor Emmy! how long—how very long she looked before she saw her brother again.

Meanwhile Robert caught up the tin case, and at last hastily mounted the steep cottage stairs, thinking he had but to snatch up the papers, lock the box, put the key safely away, and that then he would run after Emmy, and, perhaps, get first to the wheat-field after all.

But all the papers were not there! One or two had fallen on the floor, and one small packet lay on the chair—the one chair in his father's bed-room. Where were the rest? Robert had often seen them, and knew well enough that there were more papers than those which were on the chair before him. In great trouble and fear he looked hastily about—on the bed, on the floor, on the window-seat; there was nowhere else to look. *Could* his father have left some downstairs? With trembling limbs he stumbled down to the kitchen, and began to search in so anxious a manner that Mrs. Ware exclaimed, "Whatever are you looking for so earnest, Bobby?"

"Some papers of father's," answered the boy, with a shaking voice.

"Papers!" said Mrs. Ware, "they weren't those bits of paper upstairs, I hope, in Mr. Watson's
m?"

"Oh! Mrs. Ware, you haven't touched them?" cried the distressed boy.

"Eh, but I have! I didn't know as they was of consequence, poor bits o' paper like them. I lighted up the fire with 'em just now, being in such a hurry, for I called and none of you answered!"

Robert heard, but did not reply. His trouble of mind was too sore. How should he bear it? If it had been anything else that had happened—anything which time could mend, or his own efforts undo, he could have hoped for his father's forgiveness, but the papers were *burnt*; gone for ever! they could never be replaced! His father would therefore never forgive him. Thus he reasoned, or rather this was the thought which swept through his brain. Mrs. Ware went on talking to him, and repeating how sorry she was; but he did not take in her words. How could he face his father's anger that night? How could he bear the severe chastisement he would inflict? These were the two questions, so terrible to the boy, which shaped themselves in his mind, and many minutes had not passed before he told himself he could bear neither the punishment he feared, nor his father's anger. He would fly from both! he would run away, *and hide himself for ever!*

"Don't take on so, Bobby! After all, it was my doings," said Mrs. Ware, seeing the boy sit motionless with his face hidden in his jacket sleeve.

He staggered to his feet, but did not speak; he must not tell her what he had resolved on.

Robert's whole wealth in this world consisted of his clothes and eighteen-pence. This money he had hoarded during many weeks; he had earned it, a few pence at a time, by going errands for Mrs. Breeley. He must take it with him now, for he would want to get as far as he could from home by the help of the railway, and when he left the train he must go on walking—walking for miles and miles till he had got so far from Lington that no one there would ever find him. To get very far away was the thought which now took entire possession of his mind; so, whilst Emmy often interrupted her walk to look back to see if her brother was running to overtake her, he was running in quite an opposite direction towards Lington Station, which was two miles away from the village. He had only waited to put on his Sunday jacket, to take part of a loaf and hide it in his pocket (for he remembered that else he might die *of hunger*, and he meant to spend all of his shilling *and sixpence* to carry him as far off as possible).

Then he wrote two lines on a strip of paper, which he asked Mrs. Ware to give to his mother when she saw her. Mrs. Ware could not read, so it was safe with her, and if he did not leave some word for his mother she might fret about him, and fancy he was drowned, or that some harm had come to him. So he wrote, "I can't bear it, mother—the papers are burnt—so I must run away."

"Give this to mother, please ;—next time you see her," said Robert, in a husky voice.

"You'll see her before me, Bobby, so what's the use of my taking it?" asked Mrs. Ware, who little guessed what the boy was going to do.

"I'll put it here then, in the middle of the table, under father's mug," answered Robert, and without another word ran off.

Off through the fields,—over the hedges,—along the high road, till he reached the station.

Twice, and only twice before in his life had he travelled a short distance by railway, but he had often gone to the station to fetch parcels for Mrs. Breeley, and he knew how to get a ticket, for he had watched other people get theirs.

"Can I get third-class a little way on towards London for this?" asked the boy, showing the clerk at the ticket-office his eighteen-pence.

"Three stations on," answered the man, smiling. "Train's just in—here it comes!"

And in another four minutes Robert was speeding away towards London. His mind was in the greatest possible tumult, as well it might be, for his whole past life was uprooted as in a moment. Not, however, the *habit* of his life; not the things which he had learned, the lessons concerning right and wrong, God and heaven. These things followed him, or rather formed part of him, and they rushed to his heart with added force. Often, very often, had he heard the story of Jonah. It had always delighted him; he and Emmy were never tired of hearing it when their mother proposed to read a chapter in the Bible on Sundays after tea. It had made a deep impression on him, that story of the prophet fleeing from duty and yet unable to escape it,—forced back to it whether he would or no.

It added to his misery to feel that he was like Jonah; that he was trying to escape his duty, and that perhaps God would not allow him to do so.

"Go back! What if he should have to go back after all!" He shuddered at the idea, and in the midst of these fears and misgivings he arrived at his destination, and was left standing, bewildered,

on the platform as the train he had just quitted thundered on without him. What was he to do next? He had but one penny in his pocket—but one penny left of the one and sixpence. *That* he would keep to buy some milk with to-morrow; to-day he must walk on—a great distance.

“That’s the way out, boy!” said a porter, noticing his hesitation.

“I want to go towards London,” said Robert.

“There’s the road then—right afore you,” replied the man.

The boy was soon in the road pointed out to him, plodding steadily on—leaving home behind him. The train had already carried him several miles; and Robert, a healthy, active boy accustomed to be always on his feet, urged on by the fear and excitement from which he was suffering, made his way on mile after mile without feeling bodily fatigue. But for some time past the road had been hilly, and the boy began to walk more and more slowly. He felt so far from home and all belonging to it now, that grief began to take the place of fear. He had accomplished his flight; no one hereabouts could possibly know him; in *that* way there was nothing to terrify him.

It had been near ten o'clock in the morning when Robert ran away from Lington, but he knew by the look of the sun that the afternoon was now far advanced,—that it must be the time when his father would be expected home.

Emmy and the others would already be there ; how they must have wondered that he had not come to them in the harvest-field, and at not seeing him when they got back ! But had any of them found the scrap of paper, left under the mug in the middle of the table ? His mother must be still at Mrs. Breeley's ; *she* could not yet know of his flight—and at this thought of his mother, and of them all at home, the boy suddenly gave way, sat down by the side of the lonely road, and was nearly choked with sobs. But yet he never thought of returning ;—to him that was an impossibility. He had done something he could not repair, and his father would therefore never, never forgive him ! Thus the boy judged in his despair, nor ever stayed to ask himself whether it were possible that he might both have judged amiss, and wronged his father by his belief.



CHAPTER V.

IN THE COTTAGE!

WE now know what had induced Robert's flight, and we know, too, something of its consequences to himself; let us see what had followed from it in his cottage home.

"Wherever can Bobby be!" Emmy had exclaimed a dozen times and more that morning, and soon the other children asked the same question, for the hours wore on, dinner-time came, but their brother did not appear.

Still, none of them were *alarmed*; they were only sorry that "Bobby had not come," for they knew he loved to be out in the harvest-fields, and they supposed that whatever it was that their father had told him to do had kept him away from them.

Soon they became absorbed in their work,

which they continued heartily, with but a short rest or two till mid-day, when they all trudged homewards.

There they found the cottage door locked, for Mrs. Ware had long since completed her work, and left ; but they well knew where to find the key, and were soon in the kitchen.

Their simple dinner was placed ready for them on a table under the window, and right glad were they to eat it. But still they asked, "Where ever can Bobby be?"


"He must have had to go to mother at the Parsonage. Perhaps Mrs. Breeley wanted him," said Dick, Emmy's other brother.

They all agreed that it must be so, and left off wondering about Bobby.

Mrs. Ware had kindly set the other table ready for their father's evening meal, and the children dispersed again without finding the paper that Robert had left behind.

The harvest moon showed its broad and glowing face high in the sky as evening drew on, before Robert's father arrived at home.

"Where's Bobby, Emmy?" was his first question.



"We don't know, father," answered the little girl. "He hasn't been with us all to-day."

"Not gleaning? What's he been doing, then?"

"We think he's with mother at the Parsonage," answered the child.

"Ah! that's it, I'll be bound," said Watson. (It was such a common thing for Robert to go to the Parsonage.)

He kissed his little girl, washed his hands, told her he was ready for supper, and then—though he did not doubt that his son had at once done his bidding that morning—he wished to assure himself that the tin case, with its contents, was in its usual place. So, tired as he was, he mounted the stairs. Yes! there was the case, the key in it.

He opened the lid—a very few papers, some scattered—lay inside. Where were the others? Why had any been untied? All were right when he left home that day. It was not like Robert to meddle with them, he had felt *sure* that he might trust the boy. With a feeling of anger at his son's carelessness, he caught up the box, and went downstairs, and met his wife at the door.

"I've got back a bit earlier to-night," said she cheerfully, "'tis *such* a treat."

"I'm right glad to see ye," returned Watson; but his brow was clouded, as if something troubled him.

"What is it?" asked his wife.

"Where's Robert?" was Watson's rejoinder.

"How can I tell?" she answered; "hasn't he been gleaning to-day?"

"It seems not—Emmy says he's never been near them since morning." And then he told her of the state in which he found the papers.

"I can't understand it," said Mrs. Watson, growing uneasy about Robert, and foreseeing his father's displeasure.

By this time Watson had sat down, for he was weary with the heat, and his long day's toil; but he was in no mood to enjoy the meal prepared for him. Thankfully, however, he took a draught of tea from his mug, and in doing so displaced the paper.

"Why, what's this?" said he, and, as the light was failing, he took it to the door, and read,—

"I can't bear it, mother—the papers are burnt—so I must run away."



“WHY, WHAT’S THIS?”

For a moment poor Watson could not speak, and lost all courage to read these few words to his wife, for he knew how tenderly she loved their boy, and how terribly she would feel this. "Run away!" The words struck him, too, a dreadful blow, such a blow that he sank down, for the time speechless. What Robert meant about the papers being burned he could not understand; but the papers were no longer in his mind; it was his boy, and his poor wife's trouble which now filled his thoughts. But Mrs. Watson, perceiving his trouble, seized the scrap of paper, and having read it, she burst into a violent flood of tears, while her frightened children flocked round her. It was some minutes before they distinctly understood the sad truth; but at length all of them realized the fact that Bobby was gone, and they joined their sobs and tears to those of their mother. As for their father, he sat still, not uttering a word, his face hidden by his hands.

In the midst of this painful scene Mrs. Ware came in. She was in much distress when she saw the trouble in which her thoughtless action of the morning had plunged her neighbours.

"I thought as I'd better look in to say a word about them papers; but little did I dream the boy 'ud go and run away because of 'em," said she, beginning to shed tears also. "Don't take on so, Mrs. Watson; he must come back sooner or later, for I 'spose he hasn't got money to go travelling about with."

This was the first gleam of comfort the sorrowing family had received. Robert was gone, but he might return. It was true he had no money; and when he found himself tired out and hungry, what *could* he do but come home? Young as he was, he could not walk such a very great distance, but that they should be likely to hear of him somehow from somebody.

Late as it was growing, poor Watson went off to tell his trouble to Mrs. Breeley, and get advice about what was best to be done.

Arrived at the Parsonage, he found the house shut up, the tired inmates having already retired to rest, all except the cook, and she was fastening the house door.

"What ever brings you here at this time o' night, Master Watson? My heart misgives me that there's something amiss."

Watson soon told her what was amiss with him, and the kind-hearted woman was overwhelmed with the sense of what he must be suffering. She insisted on going to knock at her mistress's door, for though Mr. Breeley must not be disturbed in his invalid state, she was sure the mistress would willingly say a word to Watson in his trouble if she were still up.

Cook was quite right. Mrs. Breeley hastened below. She, too, was greatly distressed at the news of Watson's trouble, but she was inclined to take Mrs. Ware's view of the matter, as she believed Robert *must* come back in a day or two, as he had no money, and was too young to walk far. This was another grain of comfort to the poor father, and helped to enable him to bear up. He hoped, though ever so little, and hope gave him courage enough to struggle against absolute despair. He prayed too, earnestly, for help in his need, and felt calmer. "If I threatened him with a beating, ma'am, I did it believing it was my duty to cure him of his carelessness; but if God sends him back to me, I must do as my wife recommends,—try love first," said the unhappy man, with a sob.

“What you did as a *duty*, Watson, will never bring you despair,” said Mrs. Breeley. “It may be you did make a mistake in threatening the boy with a beating; we all make mistakes at times: but you *believed* you were right; so now try to hope for what to-morrow may bring. He may even come home to-morrow. Meantime we will tell everybody in the village, and I will send over to the town in the morning; and to the farmers a few miles out; so that if he has found work with them we can get him back again. I’ll go myself and bring him back if he is with any of our neighbours.”

Watson uttered his hearty thanks, and felt obliged then to go homewards. He could not keep the clergyman’s wife talking longer, when he knew she had a sick husband to attend to and was tired and anxious herself; and what more could be done that night? Nothing! In the morning he must of necessity be ready for his usual work, and yet, for the first time in his life, he felt utterly unfit to meet the next day’s call on his strength and energies.

As he turned away from the Parsonage and got into the road again, fatigue, excitement, and

the weariness of grief almost overmastered him, and he nearly gave way as he thought of the trouble of his poor boy. It was about this time that Robert, in his solitude on Hind Head, had felt himself alone with God—had thought of Jacob, fleeing from his brother's wrath. And now as Watson sat in his grief, alone in the stillness of the autumn night, he felt himself more immediately in the presence of one who cared for him, who pitied his grief. "It may have happened for some wise purpose. It may teach me more wisdom, or more love. O Lord, send the boy back to me, and give me of Thy Light!"

Then he, too, thought of Jacob, but of Jacob when he was Israel, and had been bereaved of Joseph. Never had he felt the force of the story as he felt it now. It seemed to him that it was the most heart-rending recital any one could imagine; but, strange to say, it brought with it another grain of comfort; Jacob—or rather Israel—had had his son restored to him; would he also be so blessed? Jacob had been over fond of *his* son, of Joseph, and this over-affection had brought out the jealousy which led to the lad's exile in a strange land, and to his long absence from his father.

"But 'twas my fault, too,—my over-strictness—that has brought this trouble with it. Oh! if the lad comes to any harm! O Lord, save the child! and watch over him this night, and always!"

And with this prayer in his heart he rose and went homewards; calling out ever and anon: "Bobby! Bobby!" For he said to himself, "The boy may be hiding hereabouts, not knowing where to go!"

But no answer came to him; for only the silent moon shone down clear and steadily, as it was shining at that moment on Robert, now wearily trudging down Hind Head to seek some place where he might lay his aching limbs.

Oh! if the boy could only have known his father's heart! If he could only have understood what ample store of love and tenderness were there for him, how much grief would have been spared to him and those he loved.

But, blind to the real truth, he was ready to suffer all extremities rather than return where in reality pity, forgiveness, and love—not anger—were awaiting him.



CHAPTER VI.

HOP-PICKING.

ROBERT'S new way of life at the farm continued in one monotonous round till the harvest was quite gathered in. Every day was like the day that had gone before it, and at the end of work there was only the dull loneliness of his lodging.

The woman he lodged with was good-hearted, but very poor, and herself overloaded with toil ; she was too much away from her home to have time to make the house bright and comfortable ; for after the long hours of work all day, she had to clean up, do what cooking was necessary, washing and ironing also at times, so that hers was indeed a very different home to the happy one to which Robert had been accustomed.

Here there was no rest ; there were always so many things to do in the evening, and even on Sundays till the afternoon ; so although Robert

had no actual work on the one day of rest, yet he had no companionship, nothing but dulness and loneliness. His landlady was tired and used then to go to sleep. He had no books ; church was too far off, and he too much fatigued, to go a second time ; then, in these afternoons, Robert remembering his Sundays at home, used to pass the hours in bitter regrets.

“ You’ve always been a crying when I comes down to get th’ tea a Sundays,” was the remark made with little variation by Mrs. Box.

Tears, grief, loneliness without any refreshment of spirit, are sad companions for a young boy. The one break in his week’s monotony was going to church on Sunday morning ; and there he heard good things and saw fresh faces ; but the sound of the hymns, the sight of happy families coming out of church together, were inexpressibly painful to him, cut off for ever as he was from the dear ones at home. It was surely well then for the boy, though it distressed him keenly at the time, that a change in this kind of life should take place. And it did come.

Robert had been taken on to work at the farm *in the press of business caused by the harvest.*
Now that it was quite gathered in, after he had

been kept on a fortnight or more to do odd jobs, he was told he was no longer wanted. "But I happen to know that Mr. Greenways wants more hop-pickers ; he has large hop-gardens, and could take on more hands ; he lives scarce seven miles from here, and you may go with a word from me to say you've been a useful, well-conducted boy here, and he'll set you on at once if you know how to pick hops," said the good-natured farmer who had given Robert employment.

Robert knew very well how to pick hops, for he had earned money in the hop-picking time for two years past, and he thanked the farmer, and at once resolved to go. Indeed, had he wished it ever so, there was nothing else he could do.

On the next Monday morning, then, very early, almost before it was light, he said "good-bye" to his poor toiling landlady, and started for Mr. Greenways' hop-gardens.

On the way, he fell in with a man and woman and three children, cleanly and neatly dressed, but yet whom he guessed might be bound for hop-picking like himself ; and so, as he doubted about the way, he asked if they could tell him the road to Mr. Greenways'.

"We're going there ourselves, so we'll show

you. A fine year this'll be," answered the man good-naturedly.

"You're going to the hop-picking, I reckon?" questioned the wife.

Robert said, "Yes, he hoped he should get taken on; and then they all trudged along together.

As they went, Robert made friends with the youngest of the party, a pretty little girl who looked just about the same age, and had the same-coloured hair, as his own little sister. When he asked her her name, and she answered "Emmy," Robert could have cried, but he did not allow himself to do so before strangers. But when *this* Emmy put her hand in his, and asked him to carry her basket, some gleam of satisfaction stole into his heart. "She will be a dear little companion for me, and I will tell her afterwards about *my* Emmy," thought he, as they trudged on together.

At length they all arrived at Mr. Greenways', and Robert found no difficulty in getting the work he had come to seek, as the hop-picking was to begin next day; so he, with his new companions, had to look for some sort of lodging. Every place in the village and out of it, sheds, *barns*, and temporary places of shelter erected for

“the pickers,” were full, except one rather decent cottage kept by an old widow ; who agreed, as they appeared very decent people, to take them in, and let them cook for themselves.

The accommodation was scanty indeed, but it was a most comfortable resting-place compared to many they had seen.

Next day his new work began in earnest, and the bustle, life, and stir of the hop-garden, the invigorating air, the change of employment, the voices near him in merry talk, all proved beneficial to the poor boy’s jaded spirit. He dwelt less on his own isolation, and began to calculate if he could save enough this hop-picking to buy himself a good change of clothes and have something over besides ; and though he knew, in the depth of his heart, that he could never be *happy* as long as he lived divided from all he loved, yet he hoped he should not always suffer as he had suffered during the past few weeks,—it was so dreadful.

His little companion, Emmy, worked near him, and her merry face and artless ways interested and attracted him. He had long since told her that she reminded him of his own little sister ; and the whole family were very friendly to him.

He looked back to his life at the farm, and was infinitely glad to have left it ; and as hitherto he

had found work so quickly and so easily, no disturbing fear of not being able always to do so troubled him in thinking of the future.



Long before Sunday came he found out what a wild, lawless set he had got among ; but he knew what to

expect in the great mass of hop-pickers, whilst he found some were respectable, well-to-do cottagers who lived all the year on the spot.

Robert kept as closely as he could to his new companions, or rather to Emmy, for as time went on, he found things to distrust in her father *and mother*, things he had been quite unaccus-

tomed to see at home. For instance, one Saturday night, Lorman, Emmy's father, came in so tipsy that Robert was awakened by the disgraceful noise he made. On another occasion Mrs. Lorman struck her husband on the face, behaving as no decent woman should ; but still they were civil to him, even kind, yet Robert began to dislike their civility. As for any thought of God, heaven, and the duty of living for heaven, none of these things appeared to be in their thoughts, even on Sundays.

On the first Sunday afternoon, as he was sitting apart on a sunny bank by himself (Emmy preferring to go off for a merry game with some companions), he noticed a small group collected at the other end of the field, and soon made out that a gentleman and two ladies were distributing tracts to those who cared for them. Robert drew near in time to get one for himself, and to hear the gentleman offer to read a chapter in the Bible.

"We think that many of you, busy with your work here from morning to night, may be too tired to go to church or chapel, or may not like to go to a strange place of worship, and so perhaps it may be pleasant to have some few verses of the Word of God read to you," said the gentleman.

Some few voices answered heartily, "Thank you, sir!" some drew near to listen, and Robert among the number, but many only stared, going on carelessly at a little distance with their occupation of the moment.

The Scripture selected was part of the tenth chapter of St. Matthew, and the reader paused here and there to offer some explanation in simple words, which all could understand. When he came to the words, "Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows," Robert could not restrain a sob. For he had been thinking, "Was he indeed thus cared for? Would God really take care of him? Once he had not doubted this, but now that he had done wrong, now that he had run away from home, would God indeed still care for him? From his heart he wished he could ask what the gentleman thought about this, but he dared not. His sob, however, had attracted attention, and when the reading was over, and a hymn sung, and the little group was separating, with a promise from the gentleman to meet them again next Sunday, the latter drew near, and asked Robert "if anything was the matter?"



CHAPTER VII.

A NEW CALAMITY.

THE kind tone, full of interest, made Robert's sob return.

"I was sorry because—because I'm all alone here," answered the boy, after he had been urged by both ladies "to say if anything was the matter?"

"Poor boy! what, have you got *no* friends? All the more then will God watch over you if you are alone in the world. Remember who takes care of the fatherless, and you have just heard that God cares for *all* His creatures, even for the sparrows. Be very sure He will never forsake you; but be careful that you never forsake *Him*."

These words troubled Robert, kind as they were. He was quite sure that God would not forsake those who did not leave the way of right-doing; but he, Robert, had run away from his

father, and in so doing had gone from the right way. Therefore his conscience was uneasy, as

he did not dare to hope for the full forgiveness of His heavenly Father, while he neglected to seek that of his earthly parents.



But, if ever the words "go back" came into his mind, they came as an impossibility for him.

For him there

could be *no* going back ; his father would punish him now so terribly that there was nothing for it but to do as he could, to bear his dreadful grief patiently, work hard, and try to do well in the future.

Robert therefore repressed his tears, and thanked

his questioners so well and simply that their interest in him redoubled.

“What was he going to do when the hop-picking was finished?”

“I don’t know, Sir. I shall save a bit of money, and find some work somewhere, I dare say.”

“There isn’t much doing in the winter, except for the regular hands. But if you don’t hear of anything else to do I’ll try to get some of the farmers to take you on. Come to the reading next Sunday, and” (the gentleman spoke seriously) “don’t be tempted to forget holy things in the midst of the hurry of the life going on around you, and the carelessness of others.”

With that they said, “good-bye” very kindly ; and the boy watched them till the intervening ground hid them from sight.

On going in that evening he immediately offered to read his tract to his companions, the Lormans, and they consented to listen, but he was brought to a pause in his reading by finding Emmy only intent on a game of “cat’s-cradle,” Lorman himself fast asleep, and beginning to snore, and his wife suddenly interrupting by sharply boxing her second girl’s face for pinching her eldest sister.

"I don't understand these things, I confess," said Mrs. Lorman, by way of apology to Robert, when order was again restored. For some reason or other it was plain the Lormans wished to be civil to Robert, and gain his confidence. It was also plain that the whole family "cared for none of those things" Robert was trying to put before them, and he reluctantly finished his reading in silence.

The weather had till now been fine and dry, the air was sharp sometimes in the early morning, though pleasant and genial the rest of the day; but all at once the wind veered, down came the rain in a deluge, and poor Robert suffered much from want of a change of clothes.

This pressing need made him resolve to buy some second-hand garments he had seen at the village shop, and, with the very next money he received to pay part down, and ask if he could have them at once.

Had it not been for this need, and for the boy's honest eagerness to pay his debt, he would have lost all his hard-earned savings; as it was, the few poor clothes he bought and his board and lodging for these last weeks was all the profit he got *from his hop-picking*.

Robert had never failed to attend the afternoon

Sunday reading ; on wet days it took place in a shed, and, after the chapter and hymn were finished, the ladies and gentlemen always had a few kind words to say to the lad. The gentleman told him he was going abroad for the winter, that his wife's state of health made it necessary they should start in a day or two, but that he had not forgotten his promise ; and if, when the hop-picking was over, Robert could find no better sort of work, he was to go to a farm called Millpond, a couple of miles away from Mr. Greenways', and the master there had promised to find him some work for a few weeks, and perhaps for all the winter.

"I've told him your name, so there will be no mistake, and you'll have some money to go on with after this hop-picking," added he.

Robert uttered his thanks, and felt truly sorry to say "good-bye" altogether to this new and kind friend ; for by this time the hop-picking was over, and Robert had to think of what he would do next.

But he felt no anxiety, for his savings were more than he had hoped ; week by week he had paid for his new clothes, food, and lodgings, and had laid by quite a handsome sum. He would have two pounds and more to go on with ; with *that he could afford* to be a day or two without

work, and use the time to see if he could find better employment than what was offered him at Millpond Farm, for the wages there were so low that he could hardly manage to live on them.

"We're off to-morrow, early," said Lorman to Robert, "you too, I s'pose? But we've no call to repent comin' to the picking, you, nor we, I reckon?"

"I've done well as far as money goes," answered Robert.

"Well, that *is* doing well, isn't it? Can't do better than save money, I should think."

Robert could not help fearing Lorman would soon spend in hard drink what he had been so long in gaining by hard labour; he had seen enough to be sure of that, but, as I have said, Lorman and his wife had been constantly civil to him, they were just about to part company, and Robert felt anything he could say would be useless.

Emmy had not cared to play with or listen to him so much since he had tried to interest her in talking about goodness and heaven; heaven was a strange place to her; indeed, she attached no meaning to the word, except the idea that when people talked of it one must be still and serious, and *she* liked running about and laughing.

The heavy rain had cleared off lately. To-night, Saturday, the day they finished the hop-picking, it was so mild that the time of year might have been Spring. Moreover, it was moonlight. Most of the hop-pickers meant to rest the following day, and to go home or elsewhere on the Monday.

Robert meant to rest, too, on the Sunday, go quietly to church, read the stories in his tracts (he had many now), and start in search of work early on Monday.

He sat apart in the sunshine on some logs of wood reading till it was time to go in for his supper. Not reading all the time, though, for he had a long fit of crying ; on Sundays, more than on other days, he thought about home, wondered what they were all doing just then ; if they, too, ever thought of him ; pictured to himself the bright fire, the tea set out, Emmy in her Sunday frock, his mother looking so nice in her arm-chair, and his father sitting opposite, perhaps telling Dick a story, perhaps with Janey or Ellie on his knee.

But in all these musings he never imagined *them* as being troubled about *him*. It seemed to him that life went on with them the same as usual ; that his mother worked up at the Hall

now and then; that his brother and sisters fed and took care of the rabbits, and went to and from school as before he left them.

It did not occur to Robert that, by his flight, he had uprooted all the family peace and joy.

Getting up from the log of wood, he was accosted by Lorman and his wife, who, with Emmy, were coming back from the village.

"Been a reading o' them books agen?" asked Lorman. "Well! I wish I'd been taught to like 'em when I was as young as you."

"It's the things they tell about I like to know," said Robert.

"We're all going in to supper, I s'pose," interrupted Mrs. Lorman, "so come with us, we shall soon enough have to say good-bye now."

"To-morrow morning," remarked Lorman, carelessly looking up at the sky.

"I'm sorry to say good-bye, Bobby," said Emmy.

"Thank you, Emmy," answered Robert; and they walked in, hand in hand, as they had done the first day they made acquaintance.

"If you come hop-picking here next year we shall meet again," said Lorman. "We wouldn't *pass the season without going to the hopping was it ever so*. Sets you up for the year; gives us

change of air and scene, like the grand folks. Hope you'll come next year."

"I suppose I shall," replied Robert sadly.

"Well! friends must part some time ; come in and have some supper ; we needn't say good-bye till to-morrow, anyhow."

Robert was soon seated with his companions at their evening meal, over which, all, excepting himself, were very merry. They talked of not doing up their packages till the morning, and told the widow with whom they lodged that they would not want to boil their kettle for breakfast till after eight o'clock. Robert, however, who meant to be off early, did up his few things in a bundle, placed them under his head for a pillow, put his money, also done up in paper, under it, and was soon sound asleep.

He awoke at his usual hour and was soon dressed, but was astonished to hear no stir in the Lormans' room ; but he supposed they were asleep ; if so, he should go without any more "good-byes," and on the whole was not sorry it should be so.

But what was his consternation at hearing a cry from the widow, and on hastening below, to find her *wringing* her hands and calling out, "Oh !

the cruel, cowardly folks, to rob a poor widow ! They've gone off and never paid me for this week and a part of last ! and they've taken my nice bit of bacon, and the sausages, and two loaves ! Oh ! the sinful creatures, to rob a poor lone widow like me !”

Robert then understood what had happened. The whole Lorman family had gone clear off by moonlight, stealing all they could lay their hands on, all the while pretending they would not pack up till the morning. His horror at such wicked deception showed itself so plainly in his face that the widow stopped in the midst of her own bewailings to say, “ They've not robbed *you*, I hope, my poor boy ! I mind as how they was asking you what you'd earnt t'other night.”

“ Oh no ! they couldn't !” cried Robert, turning pale, nevertheless. “ I put it all under my head in a little packet.”

“ Go and get it then,” said the widow, rocking herself piteously to and fro.

Poor Robert rushed to his humble room ; there were his clothes, which had served for his pillow, but no search of his could discover the two sovereigns and three shillings which he *had done up* so carefully yesterday in a thick bit of *brown paper*, making quite a small packet of it.

Sick with dread lest his little all should indeed be gone, the boy groped everywhere, took one by one the poor coverings from his bed, but did it without hope ; he knew that he slept soundly, and that it would be quite possible for any one to put a hand softly under his head, and withdraw the small parcel without waking him. *Now* he understood the reason of the Lormans' pretended friendship for him, and of all their talk about the time at which they meant to start to-day.

"You can't find it, I'll be bound," said the widow, coming to see what kept the boy.

Without answering, he burst into passionate tears. He had been robbed in a cruel manner ; all the savings he had depended on to help him in case of need this winter were gone !

No chance *now* to go about the country seeking for work ; he must take what he could get to do at once, for otherwise starvation stared him in the face. Oh ! how he longed to go and tell his misfortune to the kind gentleman who used to come and read to them on Sunday afternoons, but he was gone abroad some days since ; they had had no reading last Sunday ; the boy felt all alone in the world, without money, without help !

One consolation alone remained ; he had paid for the clothes he had bought, he having been particular to walk straight to the shop and clear off part of his small remaining debt every time pay-day had come round.

Thus we see Robert once more as penniless as when he first found work after leaving home, and quite as desolate ; for though his pain of heart was keener then, now it was deeper and more constant, since he had made trial of the life in store for him and found out its wearing struggle.

The widow tried to speak a word of comfort to him even in her own trouble ; she begged him to accept a bit of food and a cup of tea before he left her. "I can spare that ; ye've been a good, honest boy, and paid me up regular ; *you* didn't wait for this mornin' without payin' me all."

The neighbours soon knew what had happened, and expressed great sympathy with Robert and the widow ; but that did not bring back the poor woman's eatables, nor the money owing to her, nor Robert's two pounds.

The unhappy boy accepted the breakfast offered him, and then, with a heavy heart, started for *Mill-pond Farm*.



“ HE HAD BEEN ROBBED IN A CRUEL MANNER ”

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CHAPTER VIII.

MILLPOND FARM.

MILLPOND Farm was a straggling, untidy place, like the pond after which it was named. The out-houses were tumble-down, the cattle-yard muddy; the pigs looked forlorn; so did the people belonging to the place.

Robert had easily found it, and on his way had had many bitter reflections.

The loss of the money was terrible to him; it cut off his hope of getting a little ahead of the world, of feeling safe from want if illness should come. Two pounds was a very large sum to Robert, and would have kept him a whole month without working, had sickness laid him by; while if he remained in good health and got steady work, he might buy a few more clothes, which he greatly needed; besides travelling a few miles by rail, if necessary, to seek employment. But all these possibilities were absolutely cut off now; the low

wages he should get at Millpond Farm he must be glad to accept, without hoping to save anything out of them, unless by the greatest self-denial. But what cut Robert to the heart most deeply in this loss, was the belief that Emmy had assisted in the robbery. He remembered that latterly she would run and put a shilling or two of her own, as she called them, under his pillow, saying, "he must take care of them for her till morning," and then, quite early, before he was stirring, the child would run in and snatch the money away. He had little doubt that, instructed by her father and mother, she had stolen away his earnings when she pretended to place her own money there the evening before. How well he recollected her running in, her hurried "good-night" to him, and her last words, "that she should come early in the morning" !

He had trusted the little girl entirely, and talked to her about his Emmy, fancying that she resembled her ; she, who was a little thief ! Robert felt bitterly, as young people do when they are first deceived, that he could never trust any one again. Later on he learned, what we all learn, that everybody in the world is not to be condemned for the faults of some.

Still more deeply disturbing to Robert was the

idea that God was displeased with him, or He would not have allowed this great trouble to befall him. If God was against him, then he was lost indeed! If God was pursuing him with His anger he knew he could not fight against Him. It was not till some time after this that Robert acknowledged that God pursues us with His *love*, allowing us indeed (because it is the only way to lead us back to Him) to suffer the consequences of our sins and errors, but ever watchful, as a loving and wise Father, to lead us in all the way wherein we should go.

With these three troubles weighing him down he arrived at the farm, and presenting himself at the back door, (the approach to which was round a muddy pool), he told his name, adding that Mr. Mercer had recommended him.

"Oh, ay! I remember," said the woman who came to speak to him, "but I don't believe as the master has any work for ye just now. I'm sure he can do without a extry hand."

Robert looked so distressed, and said so piteously, "Please may I *ask* Mr. Carter if he can give me a job?" that the woman answered,—

"Yes, you can ask. He's away somewheres on the farm now, so you must wait or else go and see if you can find him. *I'm* busy, so do one or t'other!"

And with this she left him. Robert remained standing by the muddy pool, over-grown with weeds, among which some clamorous ducks, likewise muddy, were noisily seeking their morning meal, or some addition to it.

This new difficulty of possibly not getting work overwhelmed him. As he was lingering, irresolute



what to do, a wretched-looking farm-boy came along, carrying a pail of water, and spilling a good deal at every step. He stopped to stare at Robert, who at once went up to him and asked, "Do you know where Mr. Carter is?"

"He's away to the turnup-field, that's where he replied the boy gruffly.

"And where *is* the turnip-field?" continued Robert.

"Down over *there*," said the uncouth lad, pointing in the direction of two fir-trees, rising up like land-marks over the surrounding fields.

Away went Robert, and in a quarter of an hour he had got into the field where Mr. Carter and two men were at work. The boy's approach attracted attention, and Mr. Carter came forward to ask what he wanted; which Robert timidly but quickly explained.

A dissatisfied expression came into the farmer's face. "I've been expecting ye, and hoping you wouldn't come. The fact is I don't want a extry hand at this time o' year. Oh, yes! Mr. Mercer spoke about ye, and certainly I promised him to take ye on for a bit; he's been so good to me and mine I couldn't well refuse. But it won't be for anything like all the winter, and it'll be poor work and low wages."

This was anything but encouraging; nevertheless Robert answered the farmer with humility, and was taken on then and there.

As the day wore on he puzzled himself as to where he could pass the night. Everything looked wretched and untidy about the farm; it was a depressing place to work at, and no house was

visible near it. This day, too, Robert had no dinner, as he had no money to buy any, and he suffered much from hunger after his long toil.

At length, when it was quite dark, and work was over, Robert ventured to ask if any village was near, and heard to his relief that the village was only ten minutes' walk distant.

He was quite faint for want of food, and begged a draught of milk and water at the farm, and with it the woman gave him a slice of bread and some cold scraps, which the boy devoured eagerly, and then set out in his search for a bed.

The village was a place as cheerful-looking as the farm was dreary; trim houses, with a clean, broad roadway, neat shops, and white door-steps.

Within the blacksmith's door the anvil plied merrily; and as the boy stopped at a distance to watch the glowing fire, he heard the sound of voices, and the words, "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."

Well enough Robert knew the words, but he had not thought of them lately. He listened again, and found that the voice came from a room in a cottage close by, the door of which was open, as people were going in. The fact was, that a prayer-meeting,

held every Monday night was going on here, and the minister was now explaining, in homely words, as was his custom, the text he had chosen. Robert crept in and listened. It was a great relief to him to think that God might, perhaps, *not* be angry with him; that what he suffered might be from God's love.

"I could bear it so much better if I was sure of that," thought Robert, forgetting for the time his need of seeking a resting-place for the night.

The minister continued: "Now is there any one here particularly troubled and anxious; weighed down by some great trouble he can't speak of; left alone, perhaps, and beginning to think that God doesn't care for him; let him turn *to* God instead of turning *away* from Him; and that man or woman, that girl or boy, shall find comfort, shall find that God *does* care for him or her. Let him think of this text in the midst of his tribulation: 'Whom the Lord *loveth* He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.'

"My dear friends, don't we wish that God should receive us? Then don't let us complain, don't let us despair if we are scourged, if we are chastened. No chastening for the *present* seemeth joyous, but afterwards—*afterwards*, mind you—when we have learned the lessons it was meant to

teach us, it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby.

“Now I’m sure you all, my hearers, old or young, can understand that. ’Tis often, very often, entirely by our own fault and our own doing that we are in trouble, and then we think, perhaps, though we don’t presume to say so in words, that God is hard upon us. But that’s a wrong thought. Just ask yourselves, honestly, whether a good deal of what you are suffering is not brought about by your own fault. I know sometimes it isn’t; illness, or the sorrow of having a father or brother who drinks, or the death of dear friends, these things we don’t bring on ourselves; then we should take courage from the words of the Lord. And, my brethren, we should take courage from another text too, though I know it isn’t counted to be an encouraging one: ‘The way of transgressors is hard.’ Don’t you think it is very merciful, very kind of the Lord, to order it that the way of sinners should be hard? If it were *easy*,—if they didn’t suffer for their wrong-doing—do you think they would ever turn away from it? And *can* a man be happy in evil? Why, he might possess the whole world, yet if he goes on indulging in drink, or encouraging an evil temper, he can never enjoy the things he possesses.

"Let us all try to do the little things of every day as if we were in the Lord's sight, from love to Him and to one another, and depend upon it we shall get light upon our way, we shall get love to make us understand our trials and bear them. There's nothing like doing right to give us understanding in the way of right."

Robert listened eagerly. The words came home to his heart. He had done wrong in running away, very wrong, and it seemed impossible now to him to undo that wrong, but in his new life he would try not to despair; he would work hard, he would stick fast by God's laws, and never, never forget his mother. When he was grown up he would find her, if she was still alive. Then too, perhaps, after so many years, his father would forgive him.

Thus he resolved, and you will see, reader, that even with all he had suffered, he was not yet in the right road, because he had not yet determined to go home and set things right by bearing the consequences of his fault.

When Robert left the prayer-meeting, he asked the boy nearest to him if there was a bed to be had anywhere.

"Go to Mrs. Nicholls, down a lane by the post-office. She *did* want a lodger," said the boy.

Robert soon found the house, and a more

wretched-looking hovel, for a human being to dwell in, he could not have imagined.

Mrs. Nicholls was rather deaf, and very poor and miserable. She was out at work all day herself, but she promised to give Robert a bed and to "do" for him. (The boy afterwards found that she expected him to do many things for *her*, and he was glad to help any one so overloaded with toil as she was, but he was himself over-fatigued with work which was too hard for his strength.)

Thus he began life again for the third time since he left home; and a hard, hard beginning it was. He would not afford himself sufficient food, but was resolute in putting aside fourpence or sixpence weekly; his bed was of the hardest and coldest, but it was the best Mrs. Nicholls had to offer him, and for a better one elsewhere he would have had to pay more. Mrs. Nicholls was a rather cross-tempered woman, but Robert managed to please her by being always kind to her cat and obliging to herself.

"There's a many boys takes pleasure in worritin' a poor cat, but you *don't*," she remarked.

No! Robert would have scorned to worry any dumb creature, and would rightly have accounted *it* unmanly and wicked.



CHAPTER IX.

AGAIN A WANDERER.

A LONG time has passed since Robert fled so hastily from his home. It is weeks, months now, since the harvest was gathered in and the hop-picking was finished. Winter has set in and the country is dreary. Long days of rain, chilly fogs, sharp winds, and then snow and frost, followed by a miserable thaw. But December had come round, and Robert knew such weather must be expected. It did not make him the less miserable, however, as he trudged back from work, through the winter night, to his wretched shelter. Chill tears stood in his sorrowful young eyes, and bitter grief gnawed at his heart, as he thought of the winter evenings of last year; how blithely he had raced home from school through the falling gloom, how bright a fireside awaited him; his mother's kind face and kinder

words; his father, cheery and happy among the little ones; the orderly home; the nice, hot supper; the sense of comfort, well-being, and joy. How many seemed to care for him then; now he was alone, utterly alone,—a stranger in this great, wide, lonely world. How was it to end? How could he go on bearing this lonely misery? He did not think he *could* be more miserable than he was, but in this he was, alas! mistaken. For now at least he possessed a rough shelter, and food to eat—but he was about to lose both. As he was leaving work next day, the master came up to him :—

“We shall have to turn off all the hands we can do without, Watson, now that winter is fairly set in; so you’ll have to find other work after Saturday.”

Other work! where was he to find it? There was no work to be had anywhere now! And to be without work meant that he would be without food, without shelter! The poor boy was so stunned that he could answer nothing, except “Very well, sir,” as he turned away. This was a Tuesday—on Saturday he must begin the work again. On Saturday, that was in five days’ time. On the Wednesday evening, though it was a bit late and he was very tired, he trudged off to

if he could get work in the nearest town, a sort of overgrown village, with shops and private dwellings irregularly built and standing side by side. From house to house Robert went, asking if an errand boy was wanted, a boy to do odds and ends, or anything. But nobody wanted one: "Work's slack just now, you see," was the constant answer he got. By Saturday evening Robert felt worn out, and broken-hearted. He lay still in bed all the Sunday morning (to the astonishment of the people in the cottage), for indeed he was too ill and dejected to rise and go to church, as hitherto he had always done, on Sunday mornings. In the afternoon, though aching all over, he went to the nearest farm and asked if an extra hand was wanted there. But he only received the same reply as elsewhere.

"You see we're getting rid of the extra hands this winter. The country's dead just now."

"I'll go to London! in that big place there must be *something*, if ever so little, for a willing boy to do," thought Robert.

How he was to get there he soon settled, too, namely, to walk all the way. About London he knew nothing, except that it was a very large place, and that he had always wished to see it. *Now*, in these sorrowful days, there was but one place

he wished to see, and that was the dear home to which he believed he could never return. Therefore it was no mere wish which made him decide to go to London, but the idea that in so vast a city there must be *some* kind of work for *everybody* to do! He himself had known two or three young men go from his own village to live in London, because they had got work there, and they were doing very well, he had heard their friends say. He knew he was about forty miles from London, and he calculated that by walking steadily from eight to ten miles a day, in five days he should be there. Then he reckoned how he should be able to manage with the little money he had. During all these long weeks he had saved latterly, sometimes fourpence, sometimes sixpence a week. He added four fourpences to four sixpences, and found that he had three shillings and fourpence with which to accomplish the journey to London and to begin life anew. By buying a two-penny loaf and some milk, he thought he could get through the first two days' journey; on the third day he would venture to buy some bread, cheese, and beer. By the third day he would be far on his road. Of course he must sleep where he could; many people were kind, and might let him lay down in a barn or outhouse, and even give him

something to eat. Thus calculated the friendless, inexperienced boy; but this effort to arrange his future did him good, and roused him from his despair. As he turned into the village again, the sound of the organ pealed from the church, and he remembered that it was Sunday afternoon, and, listening, heard a well-remembered hymn. Suddenly he ran to the church porch, taking care to tread on the frosty grass so as not to disturb the congregation, and, pushing open the great door, crept into the nearest empty seat behind it. There, where nobody noticed him, he sank upon his knees and prayed; for, oh! he felt so very lonely, so much in need of help! Robert prayed fervently in his own simple way—prayed that God would find work for him to do, and help him on his journey, and let him find the way, and not leave him *quite* alone. And then he besought blessings on his dear mother and little Emmy, and “on all at home.” And after this heart-wrung petition his troubled mind felt easier, though with the very relief came a great sob, and then another, which caught the attention of those nearest to him, and caused them to look round. The verger, too, approached him, whispering, “You’d best go outside; you’re disturbing the congregation!”

Robert shrank into himself, and stilled his sobs

in a moment. The verger did not mean to be unkind, but he knew that the officiating clergyman was deaf, and often failed to make himself heard by his congregation ; hence his anxiety that Robert should leave off crying. The latter, poor child ! rose silently, and then went out of the church porch as suddenly and far more quickly than he had entered it.

“Nobody cares for me ! How should they ? No one cares for a poor boy like me !” moaned he to himself. But in this Robert was mistaken.





CHAPTER X.

ROBERT REACHES THE END OF HIS JOURNEY.

ONE day, towards the middle of December, a poor, dejected little figure came limping along the stone pavement of the Strand. It had been raining heavily the last two days, and mud abounded ; a wet mist was slowly increasing in density, and the desolation of the streets was indescribable. Toiling painfully along came the little figure, that of a boy about eleven years of age. It would be impossible to give in words a full idea of the weariness, the utter forlornness of the child's appearance ; to look into his pinched and saddened face was heart-breaking. To what place was he wending his steps through the gathering mist ? Alas ! he was wandering aimlessly—anywhere. He went on mechanically, seeking, as in a sort of nightmare, some place where he might lay his head. This boy was Robert Watson ; he had realized his dream, and

reached London yesterday. How had it fared with him on the way? and what was he doing, or going to do, now? He must have fared hardly, poor lad, on his weary journey, to be so changed from the Robert of such a few days ago; for he had become much thinner, infinitely sadder, more hopeless, and he dragged each step wearily. In truth he was very ill—ill from want of sufficient food, from constant grief of heart, from need of proper shelter. But it was clear to him what he would do if his weary limbs would support him, and if he could live so long. "I must try to get home somehow before I die; and then I'll go and wait in the wood near home, and I'll watch till father's gone to work; and then, before Emmy or any of 'em go to school, I'll run in suddenly to mother, and kiss her once more before I die, and kiss Emmy and all the others. I must see 'em all once more or I can't die—and I know now I can't get better—and I'll send my love to father, and then before they can stop me, I'll run out and hide in the wood, and *there* I'll die. For I can't work now, I'm too weak, and I *must* kiss mother and Emmy just once more!"

Yes, this was his fixed resolution; but had it come too late? He had so little strength—how *was* he to retrace those weary miles which were

so interminable? But though he must die, he would not, if it were possible, die before he had kissed his mother and his little sister.

We left poor Robert in the church, consoled by his fervent prayer and resolution. Early the next day he had put that resolution into effect; and, with his three shillings and fourpence in his pocket, and a very small bundle of clothes in his hand, he had started for London. The morning was clear, the air frosty, and Robert grew painfully hungry long before noon, but true to his resolve of making shift on a twopenny loaf and a little milk, he walked slowly on, suffering from intense headache caused by the fatigue and want of food. In another hour his strength failed him, and sitting down on a fallen tree-trunk by the road-side, the weary boy fell asleep, crouching forward, his head resting between his hands. He awoke shivering violently, night was drawing on, and he looked in vain for food or shelter. As he was staring helplessly at the path stretching before him, a woman, with a basket on her arm, came by, and looked at his shivering figure as she passed. Robert asked her if he was in the right road to London.

"Yes, my boy, this is the London road sure enough; but you won't get there to-night," answered she.

"No, I knows that ; but is there any place hereabouts where I could get some bread and milk, and a place to lie down ? For I'm very tired," added Robert.

His manner was so dejected that she looked at him more attentively, and felt a great deal of pity at the sight of his worn face. "You're welcome to a cup of tea and to warm yourself by my kitchen



fire. As to a bed, I can give you a sack and an old rug to lie down upon in the kitchen, so you'd best come home with me."

Robert thanked her heartily, regarding this as help from God in his sore need.

Next day, starting somewhat refreshed, with his money still untouched, and provided with a slice

of bread and cheese by the good-hearted woman, he walked seven miles, without stopping, along the London road, and then, unfortunately thinking to make a short cut, he took the wrong path through a pine wood, and lost himself as night was falling. It was almost dark before he got clear of the trees. He then asked his way at the first habitation he came to, and learned that he had got farther from London that day instead of nearer to it. His inquiries were gruffly answered—no chance of food or lodging here; but the boy was so weary he could go no further, and, noticing a summer-house in the trim garden, he was fain to creep into that, and remain there shivering through the night, folding the few wraps in his bundle round him, and getting a little sleep in spite of the cold. Directly it grew light he went softly out of the arbour into the road, and then saw he was at a Lodge, leading to a large house which stood in a grand park. As he resumed his weary journey he was so ill from cold and want of nourishing food, that he felt he must break into his carefully-guarded savings at the first village inn to buy a cup of hot tea or coffee. When would that Inn appear? He was a dreary time reaching it, and there spent sixpence of his money for some wretched refreshment; but this did not trouble

him so much as learning "that he had better go back into the road he left yesterday—that was his nearest way to London."

In this weary "getting back" Robert spent two exhausting days. He asked his way many times, and every one told him something different; at least so it seemed to him, and he grew as bewildered as he was depressed. By this time he had been four days on the road, and from the distance he had traversed should have been close to London. One of these last two nights he had passed in an outhouse, which he entered without leave; but he suffered so much from the cold, that he expended fourpence the following night for permission to sleep in a stable at a roadside inn. The people of the inn locked the door on him that he might carry nothing away; and here, too, he expended threepence for breakfast in the shape of bread and cheese and a mug of warm milk and water, and still had enough food for his next meal. He learned that he was about thirty miles from Town, and once more he set his face toward London, where he believed so much work was to be had. On this, the fifth day of his journey, he came up with a good-natured carter driving a team, and this man willingly gave the boy a seat in his waggon, and took him some miles on the

road ; but, alas ! as Robert jumped down from the waggon too quickly he sprained his left ancle, which not only caused him much pain, but obliged him to be left lying helpless on his back at the roadside public-house, where the carter stopped to refresh himself and his horses. The people here were kind, bathed the boy's foot, and gave him his food, but for the accommodation of a bedroom he had to pay ninepence a night ; not too much indeed, but the cost sadly diminished his small store. He now had only one shilling and threepence left, and he learned that he was still thirteen or fourteen miles from London.

Resolved not to spend any more money for a night's lodging, but feeling he could not walk far yet, towards evening he limped a short distance away from his last shelter, and, lingering out of sight, managed to get into the cow-house of the inn when night came on ; leaving early next day before any one was about. Once more he plodded towards London, determined to keep the high-road in future. But he walked with difficulty now, his ancle being weak ; every step giving him pain. Besides, he was breakfastless, and the winter morning was chill. " I shall get there early to-morrow, though !" he kept repeating to himself. This day, by great and painful efforts, and often

resting on gates or stone-heaps which he passed, he managed to get over seven of the miles which lay between him and London. He had been forced to spend twopence on the way, for hunger had compelled him to buy three halfpenny-worth of bread and a halfpenny-worth of milk—not too much. When night came he asked humbly for a shelter at the first cottage he passed. The people hesitated a long time, but at length unwillingly allowed him to sleep in a shed in their garden, giving him some scraps to eat and some old matting to put round him. Nor would they have granted him so much, but that he was now very lame. He was so wretched in the shed that sleep was impossible, and he would gladly have continued on his road, but for the necessity of resting his tired and sprained ankle. He looked so forlorn an object when day broke, that the cottagers who had sheltered him, in pity gave him a large cup of hot tea. It was weak to be sure, but the warmth revived the chilled boy. “To-day I shall be in London!” thought he, as he left the cottage behind him. He was right this time. By immense perseverance he gained his end, notwithstanding an enforced rest from the increased pain he was suffering. But what a chill and dread struck into the boy’s heart as he advanced, to-



"YOU'RE FROM THE COUNTRY I S'POSE."



wards night-fall, into the roar and tumult and wretchedness of the great city! Mud, mud, everywhere; every one hurrying towards a shelter; but none for *him*!

Was *this* London?—the end of his laborious journey?—his hope in his despair? Why, *here* no one stopped so much as to look at him; *here*, whom could he venture to ask for a night's lodging? There were no friendly places of shelter anywhere, no fields, no barns or out-houses by the way-side; hard stones formed the road, and the noise bewildered still more the confused and heart-wrung child.

"Perhaps I have made a mistake after all! This wretched place *can't* be London!"

Thinking thus he made timid inquiries in a poor-looking baker's shop as to his whereabouts, and heard that he was indeed in London.

"You're from the country, I 'spose, and have tramped up? Then I'm sorry for you, my boy," said the man who was serving in the shop. "Work? no, I don't know what such as you can find to do at this time of year. Everybody's wanting work and money too; trade's slack; everybody's complaining; you're fitter to work on a country farm; that's what you should try for. Best go back to your own village again, where

people know you, for you are a respectable boy, I'm sure, by the look of you. Here take this; and take my advice, and get back home as fast as you can." And the man offered him a stale loaf, which Robert accepted mechanically, for he felt dazed. Was this what he had travelled so far to hear? His head throbbed wildly, and his heart ached with agony as he left the baker's shop. But he would make more inquiries; surely there must be *something* to do in *London*. Why, if that were all, he could sweep a crossing. "You get enough to live on, don't you?" asked he of a bare-footed boy whom he had noticed sweeping the muddy-stones as he crossed.

"Hey?" said the little fellow. "Enough to live on, d'ye say? If ye call it livin' to live as I and sich as me lives. No dinner this week, only scraps, and sometimes not them. There's not enough for us as are here a'ready, let alone any new uns comin' our way. And, I tell ye what we've all agreed to drive a new boy away with our brooms, so don't you try that dodge, my fellow. You go off where you comes from!"

With this speech the crossing-sweeper flourish- ed his broom, and whistled to another boy employ- ed like himself. Robert saw they both meant to s- on him, and being too weak to show fight, wis- e.

made off to a grocer's shop near. Despair alone gave him courage to ask "if they wanted an errand boy, or a boy to do anything?" No—be off—we've got our own boys. Be off out of the shop!" This was the sort of reply he got at more than a dozen different places; he was now utterly broken down; for in the comfortless streets, among the hurrying passengers, there was no place of even momentary rest. But at length fatigue overpowered him, and he sank down on a door-step. "Move on!" said a policeman at his elbow, "move on! you can't stay here, boy; it's nigh on eleven o'clock at night!"

"I *can't* go on!" said Robert, looking up. "I really can't; I've walked so far."

"You can't stay here all night," said the policeman gruffly. "You'd best go to a cheap lodging-house if you've got a few pence in your pocket. Fourpence a night they charge."

"A bed for fourpence!" Yes, he still had more than that, and if he did not get rest and sleep, he began to feel he should die in the streets. "Will you tell me, if you please, sir, where I can find the lodging?" asked the boy.

"I'll show you," replied the man compassionately, "that'll be the best way, for *you're* not a London boy—that I can see!"

Robert followed thankfully; but only intense weariness, only despair, would have made him pass the night with such a crew as those amongst whom he soon found himself. Happily sleep overpowered him, and he got through the hours of darkness in forgetfulness; but he awoke with a shudder upon him and a fear of his surroundings.

"I'll try only one more day; by to-night I ought to find out if there *is* any work to be had. If there's *no* work, then I must die; and I won't die here if I can get back into the fields."

A few hours later another thought, another longing took entire possession of his heart—to go home once more; to kiss his mother and Emmy, and all of them again before he died; for he was so ill now that he felt he could not recover.





CHAPTER XI.

WAS IT TOO LATE?

' **I** S too late! I can never do it! I shall never see 'em again! Oh, mother! oh, Emmy! I must die here, though I did pray *so* earnest I felt as if God *must* hear me!" So moaned Robert to himself as, next day, he suddenly gave up the struggle, and dropped down helplessly on the first door-step.

"You can't stay here, boy; you must go home," said a voice, and there stood another policeman, who added decidedly that he must "move on."

The boy staggered to his feet, but, instead of "moving on," he gave one searching look at the man with his woe-begone eyes, then grasped his arm, and uttered an excited cry, "Oh, Charlie! Charlie!"

"Who is it? Not Robert Watson, surely. Oh, Bobby, it *is* you!" cried the young policeman

(who a year since had left the village where Robert had been born to come to London).

"Yes, I'm Robert. And, oh! Charlie, I'm too ill now to get home, as I *meant* to do. If I could have kissed mother and Emmy once more, I shouldn't have minded dying. Will *you* tell 'em about me, and give father my love, too, and all the others?"

The young man's voice was husky as he replied, "I'll do more than that, I hope. I've heard all about you running away when I went down home last month. Why they've been doing everything they could think of to find you. But cheer up, my boy; by this time to-morrow you'll be with 'em all again."

"But I can't walk. I'm ill now," said Robert feebly. In his weak state it had shaken him from head to foot to meet this friend who came from near his own home, and to be able to send a last message to his mother.

"You're about starving—that's what you are, I expect; but we'll soon get you round," said Charlie encouragingly. "A night's rest and a good supper'll do wonders. See, I've got money, and you come along with me."

He gently but firmly took hold of the boy, as if fearing he would escape again, and soon they

entered a coffee-house, and ordered there some soup and a bed for Robert. The proprietor of the place would not have admitted a customer of poor Robert's forlorn appearance ; but a few words from the young policeman made him willing to do so, and the famished child was soon eating some warm soup in a snug corner by himself.



“ I shall have to leave you, Bobby, for to-night, but all will be right now. You're to stay here till I come for you to-morrow morning, mind. Then we'll go together to the station, and in three hours or so you'll be at home. Get a good sleep to-

night; they'll take care of you here, they're friends of mine."

"Oh! Charlie, how good, how kind you are!" sobbed Robert.

"Nonsense! I'm glad enough to find you, I can tell you. But promise me faithfully you'll not run away this time."

"Run away, Charlie! Why, I can't—I'm too ill," answered the boy. "Besides, didn't I tell you I *want* to see mother once again?"

"Good night then, and I'll be here first thing to-morrow." And with that "Charlie" hurried away, saying in a whisper as he went out, "Have an eye on him, I'll get him safe off your hands to-morrow."

"All right!" was the reply, accompanied by a friendly nod.

Before the young policeman went off duty himself, he had despatched the following telegram to Mr. Breeley, who had long since returned to Lington:—

"Robert Watson found. Will go home by the mid-day train to-morrow. Have a cart or something to meet him."

As for Robert, think what it was to him to find himself once more in a decent bed, to rest his aching limbs and head again, to feel *sheltered*, to

know he had a friend near, and, above all, to feel that he *would* see his mother again! The nourishing soup had revived him, and the unspeakable comfort of feeling rescued lulled him. Not that he thought he should get better, or that he could ever be a happy boy at home again; he felt too ill to hope *that*; besides, was not his father too angry with him? But he would soon now leave off his foot-sore wanderings, his heart-broken misery would cease; God *had* heard his prayers after all; He had led him to find Charlie, to be able to get back home again, to kiss his mother before he died! With these thoughts in his mind, and a thanksgiving on his lips, he fell asleep. It was late when he awoke, and when he did so it was to find Charlie by his bedside with a cup of steaming coffee in his hand.

"How are you this morning, Bobby?" said the young man cheerfully, but he was shocked to see the poor boy's wan, changed face.

"Better; oh, so much better!" answered Robert gratefully. "I've had a good sleep. Oh! Charlie! shall I indeed see mother to-day?"

"That you shall, and main glad she'll be to see you!"

"But there's father! I daren't go till he's safe away at work!" said the boy. "He'd beat me so, and for running away too."

"Your *father*?" said Charlie; "your poor father wouldn't have strength to beat a mouse, let alone *you*. No call to be afraid of *him*, Bobby."

Robert turned paler still, and faintly asked, "What's the matter with father?"

"Trouble of mind and fretting about *you*, I reckon. He took to his bed three weeks ago, and gets weaker and weaker. Doesn't eat, only asks for you. But he'll soon get round when he knows *you're* safe, I'll be bound."

Robert sank back in bed, overcome with emotion. Here was wonder upon wonder! His father *ill in bed*, helpless, and all through grieving after him. He *could* not have believed such a thing possible. Robert had always felt he had a good father, who provided him with all needful things to the best of his ability; but to care for him like *this*, so much that he had fallen ill with grief, was more than the boy could have imagined in his wildest dreams.

"Astonishes you? *I* see," said Charlie kindly. "Well, never mind being astonished a bit. Don't mind nothing now, except to go home and get well, and cheer 'em all up. Why they've all been a thinkin' about you, and nothing *but* you for so long, that it'll be like receiving of you back from the grave! So cheer up yourself, Bobby, and

don't keep dwelling on the past. That's gone and a good thing too; but look forrard to the happy meeting you'll have with 'em all, Emmy and the neighbours too, as well as your father and mother!"

"I can't understand it—it's too wonderful! God *did* lead me after all!" said Robert, sobbing at the picture called up by Charlie.

"What you've got to do now is to get well, that's all," repeated the young policeman, "because that'll cure your father quicker than any doctor. Now we mus'n't lose the train. They'll call a cab for us as soon as ever you're ready, and have had some breakfast. I shall just have time after that to put you into the train and see you safe off; and you'll get somebody to write and tell me how things go, I know."

With a heart trembling for joy Robert prepared for his journey. A few hours had made a wonderful change in him. The rest and profound sleep, food and shelter, above all, repose of heart and new hope, brought back some faint image of the boy he had been when he quitted his native village. And well it was so, otherwise his poor mother's heart would surely have throbbed as keenly with sorrow as with joy when she saw her son once more. For even now he was so feeble that Charlie feared to let him try to walk to the

Waterloo Station. They were soon there, where Charlie put him into a second-class carriage, first finding the Guard and whispering a few words in his ear. These few words were an injunction to the official not to lose sight of the boy till he was safely at Lington Station, in the hands of his friends; for Charlie still felt a fear lest Robert, panic-stricken even now, might yet evade his best friends. But no such thought was in the boy's mind as the wonderful train rushed shrieking on past fields and towns, bearing him home again. Robert's heart gave a great throb as he recognized the familiar church spire, the fields and houses of his native place once more.

"I wonder how long I shall be walking the two miles! *I must* manage to get home now!" mused Robert, as the train came to a stand-still at length. The boy felt giddy with the journey in his weak state and with his great emotion. However, he thought that, by resting on the way, he could manage to get through the two miles in the course of the afternoon. He tried to reckon what time it would be when he arrived at home; what they would all be doing. Would Emmy be back from school? Would his mother be up at the Hall? He knew nothing of the telegram sent last night, and that they would all be expecting

him. Charlie had impressed on him over again, before the train started, that his father was too weak to leave his bed; thinking it better to prepare Robert for what he must see so soon.

At last—at last—Robert's journey came to an end; as the train drew up he could see in the near distance the church spire, the houses, the trees, he remembered so well! Now the train stopped altogether, Robert stood up trembling and shaking all over, so that he could not open the carriage door. But somebody opened it for him, and kindly helped him to get out upon the platform, and asked very kindly, "Whether he could walk to the carriage, or if he would like to be carried?" The bewildered child looked up and recognized Mr. Breeley, the clergyman.





CHAPTER XII.

COMING HOME.

BEFORE he could reply, some one else came up to him, lifted him up in a moment, and carried him through the station to where a carriage was waiting. In this carriage Robert was placed, a fur rug was thrown over him, and before the amazed boy had recovered his astonishment, the carriage whirled away towards his own home. But who was this beside him? Well enough he recognized the easy barouche in which he had so often seen the lady at the Hall, Mrs. Penrhyn, drive by. How *he* could be in it struck him speechless; yes, he remembered the *carriage*, but who was this in it, who flung her arms round him, trying to sob out, "Oh! my own dear boy!" *She* was not the lady at the Hall; oh no! she was his mother, his own dearest mother, whom he had dreamed of running in to kiss once more before he died! But here she was with her arms round him, sadly changed herself from the bright, healthful, happy woman of a few months ago. "Speak to me, dearest Bobby,

or my heart will break," she said, for Robert only clung to her, and sobbed, and shivered. And then he did find voice to say, "Oh dear, dearest mother!" But it was yet too early for him to ask anything connectedly.

"Your father's better. He revived wonderfully when Mr. Breeley came up to tell us the good news. He's not been like the same man since. The doctor says for sure he'll pull him through now to be as well as ever he was. My blessings on Charlie for all his goodness to you, as long as he lives!"

"Did Charlie write to you then, mother?" stammered Robert, wondering.

"He sent Mr. Breeley a telegram, my darling, and the whole village soon knew it. Oh! the neighbours have been so kind from first to last! Think of Mrs. Penrhyn sending her carriage to fetch you, 'cause she knew you was weak and couldn't walk; and she's so good to your dear father, coming herself or sending him something nourishing every day, and his wages continued just as if he was at work. Oh! Robert dear, the Lord has indeed been good to us in our trouble!"

Robert wished to tell his mother that he too thought God had been good to *him*, but a burst of tears came instead of voice. For now that he looked back he saw that his very misfortunes had

been the means of his return home. If he had not been robbed of the money saved from his hop-picking, he might have held on through the winter; he would then never have gone to London, never have met Charlie. And if his work at the wretched farm had been continued, he would still have been dragging on a miserable existence there, pining for grief, and for ever separated from those he loved. *Now* he felt that it would have killed his mother and father if time had passed on, and they had never received any tidings of him. It had needed his miserable journey to London and all his want of success to make him resolve to go back; and then he met Charlie. And what a wonderful thing it was that Mrs. Penrhyn, she who was so great a lady, should care for a poor little boy like him; to think of her sending her own carriage to fetch him because she thought he was ill! when he had been so naughty, too, as to run away, and cause all this trouble. As the carriage got near his father's house, he saw quite a crowd round the garden gate. All the village seemed to have turned out to meet him. Some of the neighbours cried "hurrah!" but several were weeping silently. But Robert's eyes were fixed on a little figure who stood holding open the garden gate, a pale *child* with tears on her once rosy, laughing face.

She had no hat on, that was forgotten in her intense anxiety, the winter wind blew her flaxen curls hither and thither; *they* were not changed, but *she* was. Emmy used not to look like this before he ran away; never before had he seen her dimpled face look so anxious! so unlike her merry little self. And behind Emmy crowded his other brother and sisters, and Mrs. Ware. His father could not come to meet him, for he was still too ill to leave his bed; so John, the tall footman, who had lifted Robert into the carriage, now lifted him out again, and carried him upstairs to his father's bedside. There was his father, propped up with pillows, eagerly straining eyes and ears for his lost son's arrival. Wan and worn he was truly, but Robert knew well enough who it was that uttered such a cry of joy and stretched out loving arms to him, as he hid his face upon his father's breast. The first words his father said to him when he could speak were these: "I shall get well quick enough now I have *you*, Bobby. 'Twas grieving for *you* was killing me! I'm a new man a'ready."

These were indeed strangely different words to those he had expected to hear, his welcome wonderfully unlike anything of which he had dreamed. In a few short hours he had found again his mother, his father, Emmy—all he had ever cared for. From being a wanderer, he was *at home*. It 4

was some time before the boy could say anything to his father, and when he could speak he only faltered, "Oh, dear father!"

"Now Robert must go to bed and be quiet, and I'll see to him myself till he's as strong and hearty as ever. A week under my care will do wonders."

It was the kind doctor who said this; he had been there all the time, only Robert had not noticed him. It was he who led Robert away from his father's bedside, he who returned to him a few minutes afterwards to give him soup and wine, and tell him to go to sleep, and try not to think any more just now.

"Sir," said Robert, as the kind gentleman was turning away, "there's one thing more—Charlie must be written to. I should be so ungrateful if—"

"I'll write to him myself to-night. I can ask his mother for the address, for I shall drive past her cottage. Never fear; he'll get the letter to-morrow morning. And we won't forget between us to send him the money he spent to bring you back home. Good-bye now, my boy. Do as I tell you; try to go to sleep, and forget everything."

And Robert slept with a sense of infinite well-being. God had delivered him from all his troubles. Yes, from all; for his father had freely forgiven him, and the boy had now lost all his fear. Never mind now if he *did* punish him.

Robert felt courage enough and joy enough to bear any just punishment manfully. That his father would not punish him *unjustly* he felt assured. But in Robert's case the need of punishment had passed away, and no one thought of giving him anything but comfort, repose, and joy. He had been punished enough. And he slept profoundly—a deep sleep of intense peace, which did much towards healing his worn and feeble frame. He was astonished to feel how recovered he was when he awoke—how much like his former self. Why, *now* he might get quite well again—might run once more to school with Emmy, work in the garden, feed the rabbits, and help his mother as of old. A ray of sunlight, winter sunlight, but very bright nevertheless, stole into his tiny window as he thought this, opening his eyes to a new morning. Loving eyes met his—those of his mother. She was gazing at him from near the door, not venturing to come across the floor for fear of disturbing him. He sprang up joyfully in bed, and stretched out his arms to her.

“The doctor's here, my darling boy, and father's so *much* better he talks of sitting up in the easy chair to-day, and we're all so happy this morning, as happy as the sun is bright!”

“How is he this morning, Mrs. Watson?” said a cheery voice behind her, and the kind doctor came

in. "Your father's getting on famously this morning, and look how bright your mother's face is! Now for *you*, my boy." "Why, I tell you what it is," continued he, feeling Robert's pulse, "you'll all be ready for Christmas before it comes at this rate. Nothing like coming home to cure everybody. He may get up to-morrow, Mrs. Watson, in the afternoon, and sit by the fire. Give him the soup and wine regularly, and let Emmy wait upon him and spare you. I've just been up to the Hall, and Mrs. Penrhyn told me you should have all that was necessary as long as ever it was wanted." Then, speaking to Robert he added, "I did not forget to write to Charlie last night. He has my letter long before now. His mother says he is to come down for a day at Christmas, so you'll see your friend very soon. But I've asked him to let me know all he paid for sending you back, and we'll let him have that directly. Mrs. Penrhyn wishes to have the pleasure of repaying him, and of sending him a little present besides."

Robert was truly rejoiced, deeply grateful! Henceforward he prayed that he might bring nothing but joy to his happy home and kind friends. He had suffered much, but he had learnt much, too, from his sufferings, and wisdom gained in such a manner could he ever forget?



CHAPTER XIII.

HAPPINESS.

TEN days had gone by since the events related in the last chapter. It was now Christmas Day.

Robert was awakened by the bells pealing out a merry chime from the village church, and in a moment he remembered what happy day it was, and where he was ; in his own dear home, instead of being a houseless wanderer, and he uttered anew a fervent thanksgiving for his present safety.

Robert was quite well now ; youth and a good constitution, the doctor's kind care, ease of heart and restoration to home had speedily cured the boy of his feebleness. He had much happiness to look forward to to-day ; his friend Charlie was in the village, and, with his mother, was coming to dinner at the cottage, his dear father was quite well again, little Emmy was her own merry self, the neighbours had vied with each other in eagerness to send some gift for Christmas ; while the dinner itself, the beef and plum-pudding and

other good things were a present from the Hall. But better than all this was his deep peace of heart, and the feeling that God had forgiven him. God had led him home, had *not* forsaken him, had given him far more than before, of his dear father's love. Now he felt he could never be afraid of him again—never. *Now* he saw that if he could have had courage to bear the consequences of his first fault, all the intervening suffering would have been spared him.

He had not yet been out of doors, but as the doctor said he might to-day, they were all to go to church together, his mother and all, for Mrs. Ware had offered to come and prepare their dinner. It seemed like a dream, the past misery, and yet its results told him that it was no dream. It was bright, frosty, weather, sunshine without snow. Never had Robert thought everything about home so beautiful. And the pleasant gathering at breakfast round his own fireside, Emmy's prattle, his mother's kiss, his father's heart-felt blessing; all these things were prized as they were never prized before. Later on, in church, Robert thought he could not ever have felt the prayers and hymns in other days, so keenly did they speak to him now; and he was right, he never had felt them like this in old times before his happiness had been *overturned and found again* so wonderfully.

As they were returning home all the neighbours had a smile or kind word for Robert, and Mrs. Penrhyn came up to him, though she had many visitors with her, to wish him a happy Christmas, and say how glad she was to see him and all his family together. As she shook hands with his father and mother, Robert was doubly happy in seeing the esteem in



which they were held. Then as they got near home they met Charlie and his mother; and I can assure my readers that during the Christmas dinner which followed no human beings could possibly have been happier, though some tears were shed as Charlie told them over again how he had recognized Robert in the Strand.

"I was just a 'telling him to move on,' as we're obliged to do," said Charlie, "when he gave a cry,

such a cry it was! joyful and sad too; and clung to my arm. And when I saw who 'twas, I was pierced as if all-through-like. Poor little chap, I *did* feel for him and no mistake!"

"It *was* a dreadful trial,"—said Robert's father, after a moment's silence, for just then he could not speak—"a dreadful trial! but we've learned a deal from it, all of us. See if we're not happier and better for it too all the rest of our lives. And as for our neighbours' goodness, it's not to be told in words, one and all were the same, rich and poor. Seems to me we must remember such things even in heaven!"

Coming out of church, three days after, the last Sunday of the old year, everybody had a kind word and a smile for Robert.

The afternoon was fading into night as the happy family party walked home together. A walk full of happiness to Robert, who was by his father's side, Emmy's little hand grasped in his. She still followed her dear brother with loving eyes wherever he went, and seemed as if she could not yet bear him out of her sight.

"We'll go to school together again next week, Bobby!" whispered she, fondly, when the kind neighbours had finished their greetings, and they were alone.

Robert only squeezed her hand by way of

answer, but the little girl quite understood it. Once more they would run through the lane together, he, and she, and the others ; once again meet their schoolfellows, and better than all, Emmy understood that Bobby was very happy that it should be so. Had he not already promised dozens of times that he would never, never leave them all any more ?

“Bobby!” said his father suddenly (and, oh ! how full of love was his voice), “Bobby, I’m the happiest man in all the parish of Lington to-day, be the other who he may ! and I know your dear mother is the happiest woman. For you, my son, was as if dead to me” (Watson’s voice faltered, and he stopped for a moment), “and you are alive again ; you was lost and are found.”

Robert left go of Emmy’s hand, and seized that of his father, covering it with kisses, feeling though he did not say so, that “perfect love casteth out fear.” Warm glowed the cheerful blaze in the cottage as they came in ; the firelight danced on the walls, and on the tall old kitchen clock, the neatly arranged dresser with its shining plates, and on the comfortable arm-chair ; and on the white cloth which covered the round table tea was ready, and a huge cake (unwonted sight !) took up a great deal of room. The children’s eyes sparkled with joy.

They were about to utter an exclamation simul-

taneously, when they caught sight of a visitor—a lady, who came forward smiling to greet the party. It was Mrs. Penrhyn. She it was who had sent down the cake (kept a secret till now), and she who had been having a quiet chat with Robert's mother.

"I waited to see you, Watson, and to say a word to Robert before I go home."

"In this house you're always welcome, Madam—welcome with grateful hearts," returned he.

"I have come to invite you all to the treat next Thursday. We are to have tea and supper and dancing. It is later than I generally give my usual Christmas party, you know; but how could we rejoice together while Robert was away and you all so unhappy?"

How kind of so great a lady to put off her yearly treat to all the village on his account! The boy held down his head to hide the tears that *would* brim over, but Mrs. Penrhyn did not mistake his feelings, though he tried to join his thanks to those of his father and mother, and could not find words. Then Mrs. Penrhyn shook hands with Watson and his wife, smiled kindly at Robert, patted Emmy's head, and hastily took her departure, not, however, before Watson had asked, "May I be so bold, Madam, as to offer to see you safe into *your own* gates, seeing 'tis a'most dark now?"

But with thanks the lady said, "No, she had her servant waiting;" and then the Watson family were alone to utter aloud their pleasure at the invitation just received, and at Mrs. Penrhyn's kindness. Indeed the *manner* in which that invitation was given was as pleasant to the Watsons as the invitation itself, so much power have gentle words and genial smiles.

"I've another surprise for you, my Bobby," said his mother, whose eyes sparkled with happiness. "The lady said as I wasn't to say a word to ye till she was well gone. Look here at this parcel she's sent for you. Anything like her goodness I never heard tell!"

The gaze of the assembled party was immediately fixed on a package enrolled in thick brown paper, which, when opened, was seen by the delighted children to contain new clothes for Robert. Yes! a complete suit; and this was a crowning satisfaction to the poor boy, who had secretly deplored that he had nothing now fit to wear, since his clothes were spoiled during his long and sore journeyings. But now he would be as nice as any boy at the tea-drinking up at the Hall, now he would have good clothes for school and church; oh! it was such a pleasure to think of! Nor was Emmy a whit less joyous than he.

"I'll write and tell Charlie!" said Robert softly

"Ah! do my boy, and a mother's blessing be on his head," said Mrs. Watson fervently. "He'll always be welcome here, come when he may."

"Now, children," said Watson, "you listen to your father for a moment before we begin our happy evening together. For this is the last Sunday in the old year, and 'tis fit we should look back. Don't let us ever forget all the love our friends and neighbours have shown us in our great trouble, and let us take a lesson from it ourselves to be ready to do deeds of love to everybody that needs a kindness. And you, my boy, will never misjudge your father again I'm well assured; so this we've all been suffering will do us all good in the end. You'll have courage for the future I know, and not feel so much afraid of being punished as of not doing what is right!"

His good father's words sank deeply into Robert's mind. He resolved he would indeed try to be courageous in the path of well-doing; and on the following morning (with the remembrance of that happy evening still glowing in his heart,) he resumed the old former home life, with its cares, its duties, and its joys, finding in them all something to speak to him of God.

THE END.

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